

Evidence, Aesthetics, and Justifying Belief in God:
A Prolegomenon Concerning the Grounds for Belief in God

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis was written solely by myself under the guidance of supervisors. All direct quotations are acknowledged and the bibliography is a complete record of all works used in this thesis.

Abstract

The evidentialist challenge to religious belief has been read as arguing that if it is not rational to accept a proposition about God, then one ought not to accept it. It is not rational to accept propositions about God unless one does so on the basis of other beliefs that constitute sufficient evidence for them, and with a firmness not exceeding that warranted by the strength of the evidence. Alvin Plantinga rejects the challenge on the grounds that the believer does not need evidence in order to be rational in believing these propositions. Despite the claim that Alvin Plantinga's essays constitute a radical departure from the customary philosophical ways of considering the rationality of religious belief and that they have decisively altered the nature of the debate, I suggest that Plantinga's views on the rationality of religious belief do not decisively alter the nature of the debate. His work is a sophisticated variation of the argument that religious beliefs may be justified directly by the appropriate sort of experience and it fails to overcome the demand that there be evidence to support the belief that God exists.

Taking as my starting point the claim that legitimate comparisons can only be made between beliefs of the same logical type and suggestions to do with analogies between the epistemological status of aesthetic judgements and the epistemological status of religious beliefs, I make use of insights derived from the field of aesthetics in order to criticise both the evidentialist challenge to religious belief and Plantinga's reply to this challenge. In terms of the evidentialist challenge, I am concerned, in particular, with criticising the claim that there must be evidence if it is to be established that the word God does in fact have an application. With this in mind, I make use of, and develop, several ideas from the field of aesthetics; that to know that a work of art has a certain aesthetic quality one must be brought to see that it has this quality; the claim that aesthetic judgements cannot be supported with reasons in the logical sense; and, finally, the idea that classic works of art can disclose important truths about our lives.

A reply to the evidentialist challenge that employs insights from a theory concerning the justification of aesthetic judgements and a theory concerning the nature of the experience of art does have the potential to change the parameters of the debate. This potential is given in the idea that establishing that there is a God has more

to do with coming to see that there is a God than it does with concerning oneself with reasons to believe that God exists. Given this potential, a reply based upon insights from the field of aesthetics is, I believe, a more adequate response to the evidentialist challenge than that of Alvin Plantinga.

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CHAPTER ONE

Evidence, Aesthetics, and Belief in God

1.1 Introduction

My work contains a number of presuppositions or propositions that are necessarily taken for granted in the writing of this thesis. When I say that these propositions are necessarily taken for granted I mean that there are limits to any enquiry, limits imposed by the exigencies of both time and space and the fact that one can not question absolutely everything if one is to go forwards. One must start somewhere. It is important to state these presuppositions; as far as the reader is concerned, such a statement removes either or both uncertainty and confusion. This is achieved through showing the relation between my presuppositions and my argument. For my part, being aware of my presuppositions makes clear to me the contingent nature of my current position and makes me aware of how much more needs to be done in the future. The central aim of my thesis was always to develop a fundamental epistemological position concerning the grounds for belief in God. This fundamental epistemological position provides me with the basis from which I will be able to, in the future, consider other and related issues. Obviously, this would include examining some or all of my presuppositions. This is important; presuppositions are necessary since they allow one to make a start but one must be open to revising them in the light of further argument and criticism. A failure to be open in this manner is redolent of an irrational commitment and, fundamentally, at odds with the aim, albeit ideal, of academic enquiry.

In this section I will specify my presuppositions, detail the parameters of my argument and outline the aims of this chapter. In order to put my presuppositions and the parameters of my argument in context, I must give my thesis in very broad outline. My thesis is concerned with justifying belief in God. I understand the term "justification" in a strong sense of showing that one knows that God exists. In other words, I am concerned with what constitutes a proper claim to knowledge. The term justification requires much more careful elucidation and it will be clarified at the appropriate point in the thesis. For my present purpose it will suffice to write that we are familiar with the notion of justification. If I claim to know something and, if you are doubtful about my claim to knowledge, then you will ask me to justify my claim, to provide grounds for my

claim, to show that I do know that which I claim to know. I can show you that I am justified by convincing you that I have adequate grounds for making my claim to knowledge.

In order to justify her claim to know that there is a God, the Christian must show that her claim to know that there is a God is a proper claim to knowledge, that she has adequate grounds for making the claim to know that there is a God. The claim to know that God exists must, I will argue, be grounded in the claim to have encountered God as a reality in one's own life. The ground for justifying belief in God will be the fact that God has been encountered as a reality in the life of the believer. The fact of grounding a claim to knowledge in this encounter is, I will argue, a controversial one, unlikely to be accepted by either a neutral or sceptical enquirer, and it is my thesis that a subject who doubts that this is a proper claim to knowledge must, if she is to be convinced that this is a proper claim to knowledge, come to see that there is a God where coming to see that there is a God consists of encountering God in her own life. This is, in the barest outline, my thesis.

I will detail, and justify to some degree, my presupposition concerning the concept of God with which I am working. I will then detail the parameters of my debate. I have employed the term "God" and the term "Christian." The concept of God presupposed in this thesis is of central importance to my argument that if a subject is to be convinced that the Christian has adequate grounds for the claim to knowledge then the subject in question must be brought to encounter God. I will make the reason for this clear after giving my concept of God. I am presupposing a traditional Christian conception of God. God is conceived of, for the purposes of this thesis, as the perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent creator of all things.¹ Secondly, I am presupposing that the concept of God has its place within what I would call a traditional Christian understanding of things, a traditional Christian world view. This is, I know, a dangerous generalisation. Christianity is not now, and has never been, a monolithic entity. It is, and has been, extremely diverse. I take it that although we can not give a definition of Christianity in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, we can identify beliefs that are and have been central to the Christian religion. I give some of the beliefs that I

¹On the concept of God see Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1991. P.8. I am claiming only that within the Christian tradition, there is a claim to know certain things about God, not that there is a claim to have complete knowledge of God's nature.

consider to be important in order that the reader might be aware of what I have in mind when I use the term “Christianity” and its cognates. First, and most obviously, I would include the belief that there is a God with the properties given above. Secondly, the idea that there is a demand for a personal response to God. Third, that the Christian religion includes a concept of reward and punishment. Fourth, and connected with this, the idea of an afterlife in which the faithful will be with God. Fifth, an attitude within Christianity that I would term exclusivism, or the belief that Christianity has the absolute truth whilst other religions are in error. This will suffice to indicate my understanding of Christianity. Since it is now clear that I am thinking in terms of a traditional concept of God and in terms of a traditional understanding of Christianity, the reader might expect to find, in a list of the details of “traditional Christianity” reference to the associated concepts of Jesus, Christ, and the forgiveness of sin. I would certainly include these beliefs but whilst these notions have, and continue to be, of central importance for Christians, my thesis does not concentrate upon these aspects of the Christian world view. It will become clear as the thesis progresses that different people encounter God in different ways. Some will articulate the encounter in terms of the beliefs just given but many do not articulate their encounter in these terms. I concentrate, in the main, on those who do not.

I wrote above that I would make clear why the concept of God is important for my notion of encountering God. The concept of God is important because I understand encountering God broadly as finding God as a reality in one’s own life, in what I am terming limit experiences and in our fundamental questioning. In order to make clear the importance for my thesis of these presuppositions to do with my concept of God and the Christian tradition I will give some concrete examples of the way in which my concept of God and my understanding of Christianity are related to the notion of encountering God or coming to see that there is a God. One way in which God may be encountered is in the experience of awe and wonder at the universe, in the feeling that the very fact that there is a universe calls for some greater explanation. In this case, we have the concept of an omnipotent creator God. A second example is that of feeling that the atrocities and evils perpetrated by some members of the human race can not go unpunished. In this case we have the notion of a God who punishes evil. A third example is that of crises events in which the subject no longer feels capable of coping

on their own. In this case we have a personal God who cares and responds. A fourth example is the need for some greater purpose, some more ultimate meaning to existence, a sense of absence and lack. In this case we have the notion of a God who has created us with an innate disposition for Him, a fundamental need to respond to him. In the case of each example, there is an important link between the response and the belief that there is a God of a certain sort. The link is, broadly speaking logical, and also psychological. Logically, it would make little sense to, for example, pray to God unless one believed that God is personal and capable of hearing and responding to prayer. Psychologically, it would seem important for the subject who prays to God for help to believe that God can, if it is His will, help. Belief and encounter are inextricably linked in both these ways.

Detailing my presupposition concerning the concept of God, and the relations between the concept and the encounter, provides the pivotal point for writing about the parameters of my thesis. Before detailing these parameters, I want to repeat what I wrote above; the central aim of my thesis was to develop a fundamental epistemological position concerning the grounds for belief in God in order to have a basis from which I will be able to, in the future, consider other and related issues. With reference to this, and most fundamentally, I am aware that I have a traditional understanding of the concept of God and of Christianity and that an account such as this will need to, at some point, come to terms with the fact of religious diversity. I maintain a traditional understanding of God because, as it seems to me, this presupposition allows me to give content to the notion of encountering God as the answer to our needs and questions. However, I am also familiar with the problem posed by the fact of religious diversity, a problem which I understand in terms of the apparently conflicting truth claims of the world's religions.² The implication for my thesis of the problem of religious diversity is that in claiming to know that there is a God, an intellectually able theist can not ignore the fact the members of other religious traditions can and do make similar claims within their own traditions, traditions which include beliefs that apparently conflict with the beliefs of the Christian tradition. Given my thesis that belief in God might be justified by bringing a person to encounter God, there is

²I should not be read as claiming that the problem of religious diversity reduces to the problem of coming to terms with the apparently conflicting truth claims of the world's religions. There is, for example, a practical side to the problem, made clear when members of the respective faiths encounter one another.

certainly a need to consider whether members of the different faiths might utilise the same argument with the result that members of the different faiths might all maintain that they are equally justified in their claims to knowledge. If so, then we need to identify the questions raised by this fact and consider the possible answers to these questions.

A second limit to the debate emerges from this first point about religious diversity. In the future I would want to bring the question of a more ultimate justification to bear upon my point concerning a more immediate justification. By this I mean that I want to consider the implications of John Hick's theory of eschatological verification for my claim that to be justified in believing that there is a God is to have encountered God as a reality in one's own life. The context for Hick's argument should now have passed. It was developed in response to the claim that religious beliefs are incapable of empirical confirmation and, as such, lack truth content. As a means for a more ultimate justification, the argument remains, in my opinion, important. Specifically in relation to my earlier point about religious diversity, the answer to the question about who is right, is, I suspect, to be one that is found not in the here and now but in the afterlife.³

As a final point, I would like to make explicit an ethos which is implicit in my inveighing against the position of the philosophers that I consider. I would characterise my philosophical attitude as "existentialist" and my epistemological position as "critically realistic". In using the term "existentialist" I do not mean to ally myself to any particular philosophical school. I mean only that I do not conceive of my work as remote from life. I think in terms of real answers to real questions. Secondly, my epistemological position is intimately connected with my philosophical attitude. A concrete example will make what I mean by characterising my epistemological position as "critically realistic." In terms of questions concerning the grounds for perceptual knowledge I am assuming that there can be, with the appropriate caveats covering particular perceptual errors on particular occasions, perceptual knowledge. I am not concerned with artificially constructed philosophical arguments premised upon the significance of the logical possibility of doubt. When I consider objections to belief in

³I do not mean to imply that there will be an afterlife. I mean that if there is an afterlife then the claim to know that there is a God will ultimately be justified in this afterlife.

God, I bear this epistemological point in mind and acknowledge that there is room for significant and “real” doubt concerning whether or not there is a God. My point is that the doubt is overcome only in encounter. I have now articulated my presuppositions and detailed the parameters of my debate. I have raised some controversial issues which need further consideration and look forward to engaging with these issues in the future. I now present details concerning the content of this chapter.

In this chapter I first present, using the work of Anthony Flew, the main facets of the evidentialist challenge to religious belief, indicating those features of the challenge with which I shall take issue in the following chapters, and concluding the section on Flew with a statement of my thesis. In order to provide the grounds for an argument concerning the way in which one can come to know that God exists, I present the aesthetic theory of Frank Sibley concerning the way in which aesthetic judgements may be justified. Sibley has two arguments that are employed in my work on the way in which belief in God may be justified. The first is that since an aesthetic judgement is a judgement of taste, involving the perception of an aesthetic quality, an aesthetic judgement is justified by bringing a person to perceive that a work of art has a particular aesthetic quality. Secondly, that even if one assumes that an enquirer wishes only to think that a work of art has a particular aesthetic quality, there can be no reasons which would justify the enquirer in believing that the work has the quality in question. Next I present the argument that a work of art can be an expression or representation of an alternative way of seeing the world and that the spectator can be “caught up” in this alternative vision with the result that they come to see differently. Finally, I turn to religious experiences and show, in summary form, how the findings from aesthetics are relevant to the question concerning how one might establish that there is a God.

1.2 The Evidentialist Challenge

Although the evidentialist challenge is found in a number of places, I discuss this challenge using, mainly, the work of Anthony Flew.⁴ I make reference in the next

⁴The term “evidentialist challenge” is taken from Nicholas Wolterstorff. See Wolterstorff, Nicholas. “Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?” In Plantinga, Alvin and Wolterstorff, Nicholas, eds. *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1991. P.136. Evidentialists are not, of course, found only amongst those who object to belief in God. John

chapter to other philosophers who have demanded that there be evidence to support the belief that God exists but only if their work includes more detail on particular facets of the challenge or if their work includes aspects of the challenge that are not found in the work of Flew. Anthony Flew posits a neutral enquirer, working upon the principle of the presumption of atheism, that is, upon the principle that the onus of proof lies on the theist to establish that the word "God" does have an application.⁵ In detailing the nature of the enquiry, Flew employs a somewhat convoluted locution writing that,

the object of the exercise is, presumably, to discover whether it is possible to establish that the word God does in fact have an application.⁶

"To establish", involves, either or both, the believer showing that they know that God exists or a person who does not know that God exists coming to know that God exists.⁷ This locution is convoluted for a reason. Flew is arguing that even though it may be true that there is a God, one can not claim to know this unless one can establish that there is a God. Furthermore, he is saying that unless one can establish that there is a God, that is unless one can show that one knows that there is a God, then even though it may be true that there is a God, this is a truth that one must go without. One must give up one's belief and a person must not come to believe in God unless it can be established that there is a God. This point is stated explicitly in the work of another writer in the field. Conway writes that even though it may be true that God exists, unless one can believe rationally, that is unless one can show that one knows or justifiably believes that there is a God, then one must give up this truth.⁸ Flew is, therefore,

Locke, for example, thought that belief in God must be supported by evidence and believed that it could be so supported. For a very good introduction to Locke see Wolterstorff, Nicholas. "The Migration of the Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics." In Audi, Robert and Wainwright, William J., eds. *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment. New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1985.

⁵Flew, Anthony. *The Presumption of Atheism*. London: Elek/Pemberton. 1976. Pp.16 and 18-19.

⁶Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. P.22. On the presumption of atheism see Plantinga, Alvin. "Reason and Belief in God." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. Pp.25-26.

⁷Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. Pp. 16 and 21-23.

⁸See for example, Conway, David A. "Mavrodes, Martin, and the Verification of Religious Experience," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 2, no.3 (1971):171.

concerned with what constitutes a proper claim to knowledge. To properly claim to know that God exists, one must have reasons to support one's claim to know that God exists.⁹

According to Flew, establishing that there is a God consists of showing both that the concept of God is coherent and that the word God does in fact have an application.¹⁰ In this thesis I am concentrating upon the claim that the believer must show that the word God does in fact have an application.¹¹ Showing that the word God does in fact have an application consists, for Flew, of providing sufficient reasons or sufficient evidence to justify the claim that there is a God. We can define evidence, for the moment, as whatever bears on the truth or falsity of a proposition.¹² Thus, whilst evidence might take the form of, for example, the testimony of another person concerning the truth of proposition in question, or the form of verifying the truth of the proposition in question through experience, Flew is thinking in terms of an argument from other proposition believed to the truth of the proposition in question.¹³ The question whether or not there is a God is to be settled according to what is said in the debate.¹⁴ Flew's challenge presupposes that there is, or can be, common ground between believer and non-believer. This common ground would consist of evidence that can be assessed by both parties and, in principle, agreement reached, given the evidence, concerning the probability that God exists.¹⁵

⁹Flew argues that the same is true even if the claim is only that one believes that there is a God. See Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. Pp.23 and 27.

¹⁰Michael Scriven also argues that atheism is, in the absence of evidence for the existence of God, obligatory. See Scriven, Michael. *Primary Philosophy*. New York and London: McGraw Hill Inc. 1966. P.103.

¹¹The thesis is a prolegomenon concerning the grounds for belief in God. In taking up only one aspect of the challenge, I recognise that this work on the grounds for belief in God is only a part reply to the evidentialist challenge as set out by Flew.

¹²Lad Sessions, William. "Religious Faith and Rational Justification," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982):144.

¹³Flew, *God and Philosophy*. London: Hutchinson. 1974. P.164. Chapter two considers in detail exactly what would constitute sufficient evidence. On testimony as evidence see Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Pp.78-79. Although, typically, we just find ourselves forming a belief on the basis of testimony we may, on occasion, reason from other propositions believed to the validity of the testimony. For example, one may reason that the subject providing the testimony has in the past been a reliable source of information, that the subject has no reason to lie and, therefore, that we have reason in this case to accept the testimony.

¹⁴Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. P.20.

¹⁵Phillips, D.Z. *Faith After Foundationalism*. London: Routledge. 1988. P.99.

Flew is presupposing that it is the avoidance of error which is of primary importance and that the way to ensure that one's beliefs are true is to have evidence for them. One should not believe on insufficient evidence because one might, in so believing, be led into error. From an epistemological point of view, evidence is truth conducive. It is important to note this presupposition. Jonathon Kvanvig has argued that epistemic principles are not infallible. We might be wrong concerning the principle that evidence is truth conducive. Although it seems difficult to conceive of our being wrong in this way, Kvanvig's point does make it clear that we should not take it for granted that epistemic principles enjoy the status of infallibility and, in appreciating this point, we can see that there may be other ways to arrive at the truth. Propositional evidence might, from an epistemic point of view, be a good thing for our more mundane beliefs but, for example, why suppose that it is, from an epistemic point of view, a good thing in the context of wanting to know that God exists?¹⁶

I would suggest that the reason why we do think that having evidence for one's beliefs, in the form of an argument from other propositions believed to the truth of the proposition in question, is, from an epistemic point of view, a good thing, is because we have learned this from past experience. We have learned that, from the point of view of wanting our beliefs to be true, it is better, on certain occasions, for example, to consider the available evidence, to construct an argument from other beliefs that we hold, rather than accepting, at face value, the testimony of another person.¹⁷ The presupposition might be defended on the grounds that having evidence, in the form of an argument from other propositions believed, has been identified as the best available means to the desired end; in this case establishing that the belief in question is true.¹⁸ This fact, if it is one, does not, however, entail that having evidence of this sort is always, and in all contexts, the best means of arriving at the truth. This point is

¹⁶Kvanvig, Jonathon L. "Credulity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984):104-107.

¹⁷The testimony of another person can be evidence for the truth of a proposition. In the right conditions we would be justified in believing a proposition just in virtue of the fact that someone had testified to its truth. These conditions are difficult to detail but would have to do with, for example, having no reason to doubt the testimony of the person in question. On testimony as evidence see Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Pp.77-88.

¹⁸Michael Scriven argues that having evidence can be identified as the best available means to the end of holding true beliefs. See Scriven. *Primary Philosophy*. Ch.1.

demonstrated by considering Flew's example of when it is a good thing to look for evidence.

As an example of evidence warranting or justifying a belief Flew gives the case of believing that a colleague has performed a disreputable action. He writes that,

If, for instance, there is a question whether a colleague performed some disreputable action, then all of us, though we have perhaps to admit though we cannot help believing that he did, are rightly scrupulous not to assert that this is known unless we have grounds sufficient to warrant the bolder claim. It is, therefore, not only incongruous but also scandalous in matters of life and death, and even of eternal life and death, to maintain that you know either on no grounds at all, or of grounds of a kind which on other and comparatively minor issues you yourself would insist to be inadequate.¹⁹

Whilst we may agree, that if it is to be established that the subject in question performed the disreputable action, then there must be evidence to support the belief that the action was carried out, it would seem, *prima facie*, that establishing that there is a God is somewhat different from establishing that a person performed a disreputable action. In establishing that a person performed a disreputable action, one would be engaged in a process of reasoning from other propositions believed to the conclusion that the person in question performed the action. The process of forming these other propositions may include practical measures such as talking to the person in question, asking others for their opinion and reflecting upon the previous conduct of the alleged culprit. Eventually, one will form a conclusion concerning whether the person performed the action. One will come to believe either that the subject did or did not perform the action. The conclusion will be more or less probable depending upon the amount of available evidence. However, why suppose that all cases are analogous to the case of establishing that a person performed a disreputable action? Why suppose that it is always the most appropriate means to truth?

Instead of establishing some standard of rationality on the basis of science and common sense, and then asking whether religious belief is "rational" in that sense, we must attempt to make critical comparisons between beliefs within the universe of discourse established by the religions themselves and their secular counterparts ... the only legitimate

¹⁹Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. P.22.

comparisons are those made between systems of discourse of the same logical type ...²⁰

An argument concerning the way in which it is to be established that there is a God can, I think, be appropriately derived from considering a suggestion concerning the way in which aesthetic judgements may be justified and a theory to do with the experience of art. Flew's example of the colleague performing the disreputable action demonstrates a clear disregard for the nature of religious belief and religious experience.²¹ Believing in God is not like believing that a colleague performed a disreputable action. Truths are revealed to us in different ways, not only by scientists or on the basis of argument and evidence but by poets, prophets and painters.²² Religious truths are of a different sort and arrived at in a different way.

Before I move on to consider aesthetic theory, there are two more points about the evidentialist challenge that need to be noted because they will become important later in the thesis.²³ In terms of the basic facets of the evidentialist challenge, there is, in Flew's work, a connection between rationality, justification and evidence. For example, he states that a belief will stand out as wholly irrational if not supported with appropriate evidence. He writes that,

... there has to be sufficient reason of some sort for believing in God if that belief is not to stand out as wholly arbitrary and irrational.²⁴

and also that,

If your venture of faith is not to be arbitrary, irrational and frivolous, you must have presentable reasons.²⁵

²⁰Smith, John E.. "Faith, Belief and the Problem of Rationality in Religion." In Delaney, C.F.,ed. *Rationality and Religious Belief*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1979. P.57.

²¹Norman Malcolm levels the charge that academic philosophers fail to understand religious belief. See Malcolm, Norman. "The Groundlessness of Belief." In Brown, S.C., ed. *Reason and Religion*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1977. P.156. Price suggest a reason for philosophical aversion to religious experience. See Price, H.H. "Religious Experience and Its Problems." In Hick, John, ed. *Faith and the Philosophers*. London: Macmillan. 1964. P.7.

²²Wisdom, John. *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1953. P.154, See also James. *The Will To Believe*. P.21.

²³The point concerning rationality and justification is taken up in Chapter Two. The second point discussed below concerns the nature of the enquiry and is of primary importance in the final chapter.

²⁴Flew. *God and Philosophy*. P.164.

²⁵Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. P.26.

There is, therefore, a connection between the rationality of believing, being justified in believing and having evidence to support a belief; believing a proposition without sufficient evidence to warrant or justify the belief, or coming to believe a proposition without sufficient evidence to warrant or justify the belief, is a case of believing, or coming to believe, in an irrational manner.²⁶ Finally, we should note, because it has a bearing on the replies to the evidentialist challenge, that the onus is, according to Flew, on the believer to show that they know that God exists. Flew does not conceive of the believer as rational or justified in believing in God until there is reason to doubt. The believer must show that she is justified in believing that God exists.

My second and final point before moving on to aesthetic theory has to do with the nature of the enquiry into whether or not there is a God. Smith writes that unless we think of a person who is “outside the circle of faith” enquiring whether religious belief is sufficiently rational to allow for commitment the question of the rationality of religious belief is an idle one.²⁷ That is, the enquirer has a more than theoretical interest in the question. The question about rationality is asked as a prelude to commitment. This presupposition is also found in Mavrodes who writes that questions to do with religious experience are usually asked on the grounds of a more than theoretical interest in the outcome of the answer.²⁸ Therefore, I am giving content to the enquiry in terms of a person asking for evidence because they are themselves interested in whether or not there is a God. The subject asks a person how they know that there is a God because they wish to know for themselves whether there is a God. It is this more than theoretical interest in the question whether or not there is a God that will, in the final analysis, provide an answer to the evidentialist challenge. I will argue that, given this assumption, believers ought to reply in terms that are appropriate to the nature of belief in God and that the reply to be given can be understood as a proper claim to know that there is a God.

²⁶Plantinga refers to the pervasive equation of being justified with having evidence. See Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. P.26.

²⁷Smith. “Faith, Belief and the Problem of Rationality in Religion.” P.49.

²⁸Mavrodes, George I. *Belief In God. A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1970. Pp.80-81.

My thesis is that God's reality is given in encountering God and that it is the fact of encountering God that is, or should be, of central importance in coming to terms with the demand for evidence to show that God exists. Fundamentally, a person who asks whether there is a God must be brought to see that there is a God, brought to encounter God. Secondly, the concept of encountering God has a dual role to play in elucidating the relationship between evidence and argument and seeing that there is a God. To encounter God one must have a more than theoretical interest in the question whether there is a God and, if one has a more than theoretical interest in the question, then argument and evidence do have a function in the process of coming to see that there is a God. Argument and evidence also have a place within the life of the believer who is aware of alternative explanations for belief in God, as long as it is understood that the context for argument and evidence is, for the believer, that of having encountered God. Finally, to fail to include, in a reply to the demand for evidence to show that one knows that there is a God, any reference to the significance of encountering God and any reference to the way in which God's reality is given in the life of the believer, is a mistake. To do this is to omit that which is most important in the life of the believer. It is to omit any reference to the way in which God's reality actually is given in the life of the believer, any reference to the way in which believers themselves know that there is a God.

1.3 Aesthetic Judgements

In this section and the next I present some ideas from the field of aesthetics. First, I make use of the aesthetic theory of Frank Sibley concerning the way in which aesthetic judgements may be justified. Sibley understands aesthetics as dealing with a kind of perception. Art critics do not think that works of art have particular qualities. They perceive that works of art have these qualities. He writes that,

It is of importance to note first that, broadly speaking, aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. People have to see the grace or unity of a work, hear the plaintiveness of frenzy in the music, notice the gaudiness of a colour scheme, feel the power of a novel, its mood, its uncertainty of tone.²⁹

²⁹Sibley, Frank. "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 137. One should note a potential problem with Sibley's claim about the nature of aesthetic judgements. He has claimed that an aesthetic judgement involves the perception of a quality and referred to feeling "the power of a novel." One

For Sibley, aesthetic terms include, for example, unified, balanced, serene, sombre, dynamic, powerful, delicate, vivid and so on.³⁰ These are, according to Sibley, all aesthetic terms since one requires taste or perceptiveness to be able to employ them. To say that a person can judge that a work has a certain aesthetic quality is to say that that person is able to perceive that the work has that quality. A person with taste can, for example, see that the work in question is balanced. The sorts of judgements that Sibley is talking about are, he writes, judgements made by people all of the time. There is nothing esoteric about the qualities that he has in mind and nothing esoteric about the capacity to perceive these qualities. We are familiar in everyday life with both the qualities and the capacity to perceive them.³¹

The perception of an aesthetic quality depends, in Sibley's theory of aesthetic judgement, on "ordinary" perception, that is on the ability to see that the work has certain nonaesthetic qualities. Sibley writes that,

... aesthetic words apply ultimately because of, and aesthetic qualities ultimately depend upon, the presence of features which, like curving or angular lines, colour contrasts, placing of masses, or speed of movement, are visible or audible, or otherwise discernible without any exercise of taste or sensibility.³²

In other words, the delicacy of a vase is contingent upon the presence of certain nonaesthetic features. Nonaesthetic features can be understood as features that any person, with all perceptual organs functioning normally, would be able to perceive.³³ For example, that the vase is delicate is contingent upon the presence of certain features; perhaps the vase is slightly curved, a light pink colour, and slightly mottled.

might take issue with the sense in which feeling the power of a novel can be understood as a form of perception.

³⁰Sibley, Frank. "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959):421.

³¹Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." Pp.438-441. For this challenge to Sibley see MacDonald, Margaret. "Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Use In Criticism of the Arts." In Elton, William, ed. *Aesthetics and Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1954. Ch.7.

³²Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.424.

³³Other conditions would have to be met. For example, the object in question would have to be presented in appropriate lighting conditions. There would have to be no obstacle between object and perceiver. For the purposes of the example, we can assume "normal" conditions.

This delicacy is not something that can be perceived by any person with all perceptual organs functioning normally. This judgement requires taste or a certain sensibility.

Sibley's theory presupposes an enquirer, asking about a particular work of art, who wishes to come to know that a work of art has a certain aesthetic quality; this enquirer has an aesthetic interest in the quality of the work of art. By an aesthetic interest, Sibley means that the enquirer does not wish only to think that the work of art has the quality in question. They wish to see for themselves that the work has the quality in question.³⁴ From the fact that those with an aesthetic interest wish to see what the critic has seen or to hear what the critic has heard, it follows, according to Sibley, that a major activity of the critic is that of bringing a person to perceive that the work has the aesthetic quality in question.³⁵ This process of bringing to see involves a set of procedures.³⁶ First, the critic might simply point out nonaesthetic features of the work in question with the hope that this will provide the key to perceiving the aesthetic feature. Second, the critic mentions the quality that they would like the interested inquirer to see for themselves. That is they may just point out that the picture in question has a terrifying aspect. Third, the critic might link the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic. Fourth, the critic might make use of simile and metaphor. Fifth, contrasts and comparisons may be employed by the critic. For example, asking the enquirer to imagine what the effect would be if a particular nonaesthetic feature were absent or if a nonaesthetic feature were added. Sixth, is the use of repetitions and reiteration, bringing the enquirer back again and again to those features that the critic wishes the enquirer to notice. Finally, the performance of the critic is important. This has to do with, for example, their gestures during the explanation.³⁷

If the enquirer comes to perceive something that was previously not perceived then the critic has been successful and provided a perceptual proof for their initial

³⁴Sibley also discusses the case of a neophyte who can perceive that the work has a certain quality but who is unable to say what is responsible for that quality. The critic, in contradistinction, can explain what is responsible for aesthetic quality. Sibley. "*Aesthetic and NonAesthetic*." Pp.140-141.

³⁵Sibley. "*Aesthetic and NonAesthetic*." P.141.

³⁶Sibley. "*Aesthetic Concepts*." Pp.442-445.

³⁷The important point here is just that there is, according to Sibley, a set of procedures for bringing a person to see that a work has a particular quality. In Chapter Five I argue that there are "procedures" for bringing a person to see that God exists and, in that context, I elucidate upon what is involved in these procedures.

judgement. The enquirer now knows that the work has the quality in question, where to know means that the person can see or hear for themselves that the work has the quality in question. If the perceptual proof is successful then, according to Sibley, it would be right to say that the critic has justified their original judgement, and in the best possible way.³⁸ We can say that a process that ends up with a person seeing that a work has a certain quality is a different process from that of offering of reasons to believe that the work has the quality in question. If a person wished to think that a work had a certain quality, then that person could take the word of twenty competent critics all of whom judged a work to be delicate. Sibley says this of aesthetic judgements.

... an activity the successful outcome of which is seeing or hearing cannot, I think, be called *reasoning*. I may have reasons for thinking that something is graceful but not reasons for seeing it is. Yet aesthetic perception ... is essential to aesthetic judgement; one could not therefore be brought to make an aesthetic judgement simply as the outcome of considering reasons, however good. It is a confusion of disparate activities to suppose that in this sense one could have a "rational justification" for making an aesthetic judgement. Thus the aesthetic judgements that I am concerned with can neither *have* nor *lack* a rational basis in this sense, namely that they can either be or fail to be the outcome of good or bad reasoning. Perception is "supported" in the manner described or not at all.³⁹

Knowing that the work has that quality comes from experiencing or perceiving that the work has that quality. It follows from this that the justification of a judgement concerning the qualities of a work of art cannot be a matter of offering reasons in the logical sense to support that judgement.

1.4 Reasons and Aesthetic Judgements

I now give Sibley's argument concerning why aesthetic judgements are not capable of being supported with reasons. My starting point is that one might be tempted to think that the nonaesthetic features of a work of art could count as reasons to believe that a work has a certain quality. After all, if a critic says that three nonaesthetic features are responsible for the judgement that a work is balanced, could we not take the presence of these features as reasons to think that the work has the aesthetic

³⁸Sibley. "*Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic*." P.143.

³⁹Sibley. "*Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic*." P.144.

quality in question? This would not be an aesthetic judgement since one would not have perceived that the work has the quality in question but, if these were reasons, then one could claim to know, or at least justifiably believe that the work had the aesthetic quality in question. This would, however, be a mistake and to see why we must consider the second part of Sibley's theory and go into more detail concerning what is meant by having a reason.

In the case of asking for reasons to believe that the work has the quality in question, there is no aesthetic interest on the part of the enquirer. From the critics point of view such an activity may be "*practically pointless and aesthetically worthless.*"⁴⁰ Sibley puts aside the point about bringing a person to see that a work has a certain quality and asks whether any statements about the nonaesthetic qualities of a thing could be made so that a person would have to admit, if these statements were true, that the work must have or probably does have the aesthetic qualities that the critic claims for it. If we understand what Sibley has to say about this then we will understand something more about the confusion of wanting to know that God exists and asking for reasons to believe that God exists.

Sibley takes a reason to be a true statement of fact such that, on the basis of knowing it, it would be reasonable, right or plausible to infer, suppose or judge that something is so.⁴¹ A reason would consist of a proposition about the nonaesthetic features of the work such that on the basis of knowing it, it would be plausible to infer that the work has a certain aesthetic quality. For example, if one knows that the work is pale pink, lightly mottled and slightly curving, it would be reasonable or right to infer that the work is delicate. When we know what is involved in it "being right to infer", then

⁴⁰Sibley. "*Aesthetic and NonAesthetic.*" P.145.

⁴¹Sibley. "*Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic.*" P.146. See also Sibley. "*Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic.*" P.149. Sibley is here rejecting the claim of Monroe Beardsley that aesthetic judgements can be supported with reasons. Beardsley is writing not about reasons to support the claim that a work has a particular aesthetic quality but reasons to suppose that the work in question is good. See Beardsley, Monroe. "*On the Generality of Critical Reasons.*" *The Journal of Philosophy* 59, No.18 (1962):479-480. Sibley notes that Beardsley is writing about merit and not aesthetic qualities and justifies reference to Beardsley saying that Beardsley does not explicitly restrict his account of reasons to reasons for a verdict. See Sibley. "*Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic.*" Pp.148-149. There is of course a connection between aesthetic judgements and overall verdicts. A work of art will, for example, be judged to be good because it is balanced. On aesthetic perception and overall verdicts see Holloway, John. "*Distinctive Features in Criticism of the Arts,*" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 23 (1949):173-182.

we will know why aesthetic judgements cannot be supported with reasons in the logical sense.⁴²

We need a fuller account of what is meant by a reason in the logical sense and I take this, in the main from Robert Audi.⁴³ First, reasons for a belief are propositions that are believed.⁴⁴ In what sense could the belief that this work is pale pink, slightly curving and lightly mottled be a reason to believe that it is delicate? Audi gives the following conditions that must be fulfilled if *r* is to be a reason for which a person believes *p*, in this case a reason for which a person believes that the work in question is delicate. First, if *r* is a reason for which a person believes that the work is delicate, then her believing *r* is a part of what explains why she believes that the work is delicate. In the case of the person who believes that the work is delicate, the explanation of her believing this is that she believes that the work is pale pink, lightly mottled and slightly curved. The second condition is that a person who believes for a reason *r* that a work is delicate must in some way see that *r* supports the belief that the work is delicate. This is the important condition in relation to the question of aesthetic judgements. It is this second condition that brings out why reasons in the logical sense cannot, according to Sibley, be given to support an aesthetic judgement. There is what Audi calls a connecting belief requirement. If a person believes for a reason that a work has a certain aesthetic quality, then that person must believe that there is some kind of support relation between the proposition that the work is delicate and the proposition that it is pale pink, lightly mottled and slightly curving.

If *r* is to be a reason for which a person believes that the work is delicate then that person must be aware of or see the connection between the reason *r* and the proposition that it supports. One way in which they might see that there is a connection between the reason *r* and the proposition that the work is delicate is if reason *r* always counts towards the work being delicate. If *r* is to be a reason to believe that a work is

⁴²On inference see Audi, Robert. "Belief, Reason and Inference," *Philosophical Topics* 14, no.1. (1986):31-32. Inference is understood generically as passing from one or more premises to a conclusion.

⁴³Audi, Robert. "Belief, Reason and Inference." Pp.32-40. Audi aims to give the conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a person believing a proposition for a reason. I am not giving all of the conditions, only those that are useful for understanding why an aesthetic judgement cannot be supported with reasons in the logical sense.

⁴⁴Audi, Robert. *The Structure of Justification*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1991. Pp.96-97. Armstrong, D.M. *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1973. Pp.78-79.

delicate then, in order to see that reason *r* does support the belief that the work is delicate, it must always be a reason to believe that a work is delicate. If this were the case, if *r* were always a reason to believe a work to be delicate, then a person could be confident in their belief that the work in question is delicate. Every work that is, for example, pale pink, lightly mottled and slightly curving will be delicate. Alternatively, these features might, very often, count towards a work being delicate and a person could hold the belief that the work is delicate and cite the belief that the work is pale pink etc. In this case the person would see the reason as rendering it probable that the work in question is delicate. Thus, armed with this formula, our subject could wander the galleries and, upon coming to a work with these nonaesthetic qualities, infer that it is delicate.⁴⁵ A person such as this, a person lacking taste, could have no great confidence in their judgement and we will see why below.

Is it the case that there are certain statements about the nonaesthetic features of a work that can serve as a basis for agreeing that it has the aesthetic quality attributed to it? Sibley denies that this is the case saying that,

Things may be described to us in nonaesthetic terms as fully as we please but we are not thereby put in a position of having to admit ... that they are delicate or graceful or garish or exquisitely balanced.⁴⁶

For Sibley, there are no nonaesthetic qualities that count only one way so that if an object had these qualities one could say that it is delicate. For example, lightness, slimness, gentle curves and lack of intensity of colour do not count only for delicacy and not for flamboyance.⁴⁷ The problem is that these features count only typically or characteristically towards delicacy. That is, the same features which count towards delicacy also count towards a work being insipid or wan or anaemic.⁴⁸ Sibley says,

But to say that features are associated only *characteristically* with an aesthetic term *is* to say that they are not conditions; no description however full, even in terms characteristic of gracefulness, puts it beyond

⁴⁵Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.432.

⁴⁶Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.426.

⁴⁷Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P..427.

⁴⁸Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.428.

question that something is graceful in the way a description may put it beyond question that someone is lazy or intelligent.⁴⁹

This means that, on the basis of knowing that a work has certain nonaesthetic features it would not be plausible to infer that the work has the aesthetic quality in question. The reason that it would not be right to do so is that those nonaesthetic features might count towards the work being wan or insipid rather than delicate. The person who lacks the ability to “see” that the work is delicate, would be incapable of perceiving which way the nonaesthetic qualities counted. The connection between the reason and the belief is missing. That is, the fact that the work has these nonaesthetic features does not render it either certain or probable that the work has the aesthetic quality in question.

Could it not be the case that a judgement would be more secure if given in terms of defeasible conditions? Sibley defines a defeasible condition as follows. He says that,

The most we can say schematically for a defeasible concept is that, for example, A,B, and C together are sufficient for the concept to apply *unless* some feature is present which overrides or voids them.⁵⁰

According to Sibley, aesthetic concepts are not even governed by conditions in this way. For example we would not be able to say that if this painting "*consists solely of one or two bars of very pale blue and a very pale grey set at right angles on a pale fawn ground and if furthermore, there are no angularities and no vivid colours, this picture is delicate.*"⁵¹ The judgement can be made no more secure by employing a formula that deals with defeasible conditions. The same problem would remain. For the person without taste, there is no way of telling which way the nonaesthetic features do count. The reason that one has, that is the proposition that the work is pale pink, lightly mottled and slightly curving does not connect with the judgement in the right way. In Audi's terms there is no support relation between the reason *r* and the judgement that the work has the aesthetic quality.

For Sibley, the only way in which aesthetic terms are governed is that they may be so negatively. If a vase is pale pink and slightly mottled it cannot be garish. Thus, although a person may not be able to believe that the work is delicate, they could infer

⁴⁹Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.429.

⁵⁰Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.429.

⁵¹Sibley. "Aesthetic Concepts." P.430 for his argument about defeasible conditions.

from the presence of certain nonaesthetic qualities that it cannot be garish. There would be an appropriate relation between the reason *r* and the belief that the work is not garish. Although Sibley does not detail this, the negative conditions would have to be pointed out by a critic. Therefore, in trying to understand Sibley's point concerning why the critic does not offer reasons in the logical sense, we see that he is arguing that the reasons offered provide no grounds to infer that the work does have that quality. The reasons offered do not allow an inference to the truth of the judgement and, if we ask why not, we see that the reason for this is that the reasons offered provide neither deductive nor inductive justification for the judgement. It is only when one has made an aesthetic judgement that one will see which way the qualities do count.

1.5 Ways of Seeing

The analogue of coming to see that a work has a particular aesthetic quality is, in the religious case, coming to see that there is a God. Coming to see that there is a God is, I shall argue, a matter of encountering God and one can be brought to encounter God by being presented with a different "picture" of the world, being presented with a different way of seeing things. Before continuing with my work on aesthetic theory, I will elucidate upon the notions of encountering God and having a certain picture in terms of which one lives. First, to encounter God is for God to become a reality in one's life. Knowing that there is a God is not a matter of believing propositions about God. Nor is it a matter simply of feeling a certain way about God. To come to have faith in God is not to come to believe that there is a God or to come to feel a certain way; it is an experience or event in which the subject comes up against God in the realisation of God as an answer to a need.⁵²

Secondly, a picture of the world consists of a set of beliefs that orient and guide those who live in terms of this picture. Those who live in terms of a particular picture think and act differently. A picture of the world consists of particular beliefs but also and, most fundamentally, certain framework propositions that are taken for granted in this way of looking at the world. For example, in our picture of the everyday life world, the world in which we all live and find intelligible, there are a number of framework

⁵²The term "encountering God" is taken from John E. Smith. Smith, John E. *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1968. Pp.31-32. For this understanding of faith see Hepburn, Ronald. *Christianity and Paradox. Critical Studies in Twentieth Century Theology*. London: Watts. 1958. P.28.

propositions that are not questioned, that we take for granted and rarely formulate. These fundamental propositions would include, for example, propositions to do with the reality of the external world, propositions to do with the existence of other people besides ourselves, propositions to do with the past and the future. These are the fundamental beliefs in terms of which we live. They are not questioned and we find it strange, in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, if we are questioned about them. These propositions are not learned. We do not learn that there is an external world, that there are other people like ourselves. Rather, we might say, they are just there, given in our other beliefs and actions.⁵³

Keith Yandell, who has devoted an entire book to arguing that there can be evidence for the existence of God, writes that,

... there are accounts of religious faith wherein having faith and having strong evidence are perfectly compatible. At least philosophically, and arguably on religious grounds as well, these are more adequate conceptions of faith than those where the presence of evidence threatens faith. My faith in my good friends is not threatened because I have evidence for their existence and integrity. Why should things be different concerning religious faith?⁵⁴

This is confused; in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, we never question whether or not our friends exist. I may believe that my friends have integrity and I may have evidence for their integrity but can I, in the natural attitude of the

⁵³On a picture of the world see Nielsen, Kai. "Religion and Groundless Believing." In Runzo, J. Ihara, C.K., eds. *Religious Experience and Religious Belief. Essays in the Epistemology of Religion*. USA: University Press of America. 1986. Pp.19-20. See also Malcolm. "The Groundlessness of Belief." Pp.143-144. See also Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. Pp.41 and 55. I am aware that Phillips understands belief in God to be non-cognitive and will explain my understanding of this claim in Chapter 5. For the common sense attitude of the everyday life world see Schutz, Alfred and Luckmann, Thomas. *The Structures of the Life World. Vol.1*. Translated by Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. London: Heinemann. 1974. Pp.3-5. Schutz argues that there is, for example, a common sense attitude in the everyday life world which is the world that we take for granted everyday. The attitude includes, for example, taking for granted the reality of the external world and the existence of persons other than ourselves. Whether or not there really are life worlds is similar to the question whether or not there are really such things as conceptual schemas. To the claim that the latter are metaphysical constructs that ought to be rejected as illusory, Joseph Runzo replies that we can suppose that there are such things because of their explanatory power. See Runzo, Joseph. Reason, Relativism and God. London: Macmillan. 1986. P.51 Hick's work on natural meaning and significance makes a case similar to that of Schutz. See Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses To The Transcendent*. Ch.8. In saying that it is similar I mean only that his theory includes the idea that there is a world to which we respond appropriately, taking for granted the reality of that world. Hick has an early version of this in Hick, John. *Faith and Knowledge*. London: Macmillan. 1988. Ch.5 This chapter remains unchanged from the original 1957 version.

⁵⁴Yandell, Keith E. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1994. P.1.

everyday life world, be said to believe that they exist? Could anything that happens make me doubt that my friends exist? Certainly one can imagine circumstances in which subject s might come to doubt that her friends exist, but in coming to doubt she would no longer be in the attitude of common sense in the world that we all take for granted. She would, for example, have become insane or have entered into a theoretical attitude of philosophical reflection. That there are other persons besides ourselves is an example of what Phillips would take to be a basic proposition, a presupposition that is given in the way that we look at things. For Phillips, just as, in the natural attitude of the everyday life world, the belief that there are other persons besides ourselves is a basic proposition, something taken for granted and never questioned, so in the religious attitude or religious way of looking things, the belief in God's reality, is an example of a basic proposition in the sense of being fundamental, presupposed and given in this way of looking at things. Finally, a picture of the world, as I conceive of it differs from a conceptual schema or system of ideas in that it is a total way of looking at things. I understand a conceptual schema to be a more formalised system of beliefs.⁵⁵

Flew rejects the position that I am advocating on the grounds that if one has faith in God then one must believe that God exists.⁵⁶ One must have faith in someone or something and this means that "faith in" must always involve beliefs. Most fundamentally, it is impossible to have faith in God without believing that God exists. We would not be able to make any sense of the claim that someone trusts God without believing that God exists and that God is worthy of trust; the strong conclusion drawn from this is that it is impossible in logic to have faith in God without believing that God exists. The notion of having faith in God without believing that God exists is, it is said, incoherent.⁵⁷ To have faith in God is to have faith in someone or something. Since to have faith in God is also to believe that God exists, Flew maintains that his demand for evidence has not been shown to "*misconceived*." Evidence for the existence of God remains important.

⁵⁵Runzo, Joseph. *Reason Relativism and God*. London: Macmillan. 1986. P.30 and Footnote 51, P.75.

⁵⁶Flew. *God and Philosophy*. Pp.173-176.

⁵⁷Penelhum, Terrence. *Problems of Religious Knowledge*. London: Macmillan. 1971. P.16. See also Trigg, Roger. *Reason and Commitment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1973. PP.46-47.

Flew has, however, failed to appreciate what is involved in the claim that God's reality is given in a way of looking at things. The point is, or at least can be, that believers do not believe that God exists in the same way that one believes that one sees a table. One could not find out that there is a God in the same way that one could find out whether or not there is really a chair in the next room. It makes no sense to think of discovering God in the same way that one discovers an object that one has lost. It is in this sense that believers do not believe that God exists and in this sense that belief in God is given in a picture of the world. The reality of God is given in the same way that the reality of the external world is given. We do not believe that there is an external world. We do not formulate the proposition that there is an external world. Nor do we say that we believe that there are such things as chairs and tables. There are any number of other propositions that we do believe in this sense.⁵⁸ Nor is faith in God, as I wrote above, a case of simply feeling a certain way. It is to encounter God in one's life and it is, as we will see in chapter two, Flew's rejection of the significance of this encounter, that renders his position on the rationality of religious belief untenable.

The notion that believers have a picture of the world is analogous to R.M. Hare's argument that believers have a certain "Blik" which consists, first of all, of a belief or set of beliefs and, secondly, of acting in a way commensurate with those beliefs. When Hare refers to a "Blik" in terms of a specific belief he has in mind the idea that there are certain beliefs that, most of the time, we do not question, that we take for granted in our everyday experience. For example, he writes, that occasionally he will wonder whether his steering mechanism will malfunction but, for most of the time, he trusts that his steering mechanism will not malfunction. He writes, however, that,

... I find it not at all difficult to imagine what it would be like to lose this *blik* and acquire the opposite one.⁵⁹

⁵⁸On the question whether one could believe that God exists without having faith in God see Trigg, Roger. *Reason and Commitment*. P.41. Malcolm, Norman. "It is it a Religious Belief that God Exists?" In Hick, John.(ed). *Faith and the Philosophers*. P.107. Price, H.H. "Religious Experience and Its Problems." In Hick. *Faith and the Philosophers*. P.9. Penelhum, Terrence. *Problems of Religious Knowledge*. P.135. To believe that God exists is simply to estimate the probability that there is an object corresponding to the word God. This would not be a religious belief in the same sense that thinking that a work of art has a particular quality would not be an aesthetic judgement. "Religious" belief in God is grounded not in reasons but faith.

⁵⁹Hare, R.M. In Flew and MacIntyre, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. London:SCM Press. 1955. P.100.

Although it is possible to doubt certain beliefs, most of the time we do not doubt. Hare also conceives of a Blik as a total picture of the world, writing that our experience of the world depends upon our Blik. Once again, however, he does not have in mind what I have referred to as framework propositions but more specific beliefs such as his continued well being, or the continued reliability of steel joints. The similarity between the picture of the world and the Blik is given in Hare's claim that the Blik that includes belief in God is not a hypothesis to be tested. Believers live in terms of their Blik and their Blik is shown in what they do. Furthermore, they care about their Blik.

Presently, I will suggest that it is through entering into or taking up this picture that one comes to see that there is a God. In taking up this picture, this way of looking at things, the subject's perspective or attitude is fundamentally changed. One of the ways in which one's way of seeing or picture of the world can be changed is through experiencing a work of art. Judgements about art are not restricted to the sorts of judgements that Sibley discusses. In experiencing some works of art, but not only works of art, we may be changed by what we see. John Berger quotes comments on the painting of the Regentesses by Hals.

Each woman speaks to us of the human condition with equal importance. Each woman stands out with equal clarity against the *enormous* dark surface, yet they are linked by a firm rhythmical arrangement and the subdued diagonal pattern formed by their heads and hands. Subtle modulations of the *deep*, glowing blacks contribute to the *harmonious fusion* of the whole and form an *unforgettable contrast* with the *powerful* whites and vivid flesh tones where the detached strokes reach a peak of breadth and strength.⁶⁰

The sorts of terms employed by the author quoted by Berger are those that Sibley is concerned with in his defence of the way in which aesthetic judgements are justified. Berger's criticism is, not that the compositional unity of the painting is unimportant, but that,

... here the composition is written about as though it were in itself the emotional charge of the painting. Terms like harmonious fusion, unforgettable contrast, reaching a peak of breadth and strength transfer

⁶⁰Seymour, Slive. Frans Hals quoted in Berger John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books. 1975. P.13. Italics Berger.

the emotion provoked by the image from the plane of lived experience to that of disinterested 'art appreciation'.⁶¹

For Berger, in appreciating the work of art, it is not the technical excellence of the painting that is of primary importance, nor the sorts of aesthetic qualities that Sibley is concerned with, but what the work allows us to see. The "*unforgettable contrast*" in Hals' painting of the Regentesses is that between Hals, himself a pauper, examining the affluent sitters through the eyes of pauper, whilst trying to be objective. According to Berger, what we can see in the painting, if we attend closely enough, is the way that Hals saw the sitters. Berger says "*Hals was the first portraitist to paint the new characters and expressions of created by Capitalism*".⁶²

The fundamental theme of Berger's book is ways of seeing. Writing of the tradition of oil painting, Berger writes that,

... a way of seeing the world, which was ultimately determined by new attitudes to property and exchange, found its visual expression in the oil painting, and could not have found it in any other visual art form.⁶³

Works of art present, for the viewer, a visual image of a way of seeing; in this case seeing the world in terms of what money could buy. Oil painting, for Berger, had to demonstrate the desirability of what money could buy, an effect achieved by making the objects "tangible".⁶⁴ Berger writes that Holbein's painting, "The Ambassadors" (1533), represents a stance towards the world or it shows us how those in a certain social position saw the world and their own place within it. Holbein's painting represents a perspective, in this case the perspective of two men with a certain, privileged social standing. Berger refers to an aloofness, an individuality with no possibility of equality between the subjects and the viewer. Finally, Berger says of these pictures that,

They did not need to stimulate the imagination. If they had, they would have served their purpose less well. Their purpose was not to transport their spectator-owners into new experience, but to embellish such experience as they already possessed. Before these canvases the spectator-owner hoped to see the classic face of his own passion or grief

⁶¹Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.13.

⁶²Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.16.

⁶³Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.87.

⁶⁴Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.90.

or generosity. The idealised appearances he found in the painting were an aid, a support to his own view of himself. In those appearances he found the guise of his own ... or view of himself.⁶⁵

Paintings can, according to Berger, present a view of oneself or of a class in order to reinforce that view. From a contemporary perspective, the painting can be read in terms of a way of seeing; the way in which subjects saw themselves and the way in which they saw the world.

There is, in Berger's theory, the notion that a painting can challenge a way of seeing. Berger has in mind the idea that painter of a particular period can produce a work of art that is at odds with or challenges the dominant tradition. Before I consider that idea, I want to consider the way in which a painting produced in order to reinforce the subject's view of themselves might, for the viewer, change their picture of the world. For example, for purposes of argument, let us assume that Berger is right that oil painting between 1500 and 1900 served to reinforce views to do with the value of wealth.⁶⁶ Appreciating these paintings might reinforce the viewer's own notion that wealth is a good thing. It might, if the viewer is not wealthy, reinforce the view that wealth is a bad thing. However, it might also change one's views on whether wealth is a good or a bad thing. In none of these cases do we have a disinterested viewer. The difficulty of stating exactly what effect a particular work of art will have is that the viewer will come with a certain pre-understanding, with their own temperament, hopes, fears, desires, aspirations and effective history.⁶⁷

We may take an example of a person who has had their way of looking at things changed through experiencing a particular work of art. Rosalind Hursthouse writes that before viewing Picasso's "Guernica (1937), her thoughts on war were ambivalent. The words "*war is terrible*" would evoke images of blood, pain and loss but equally words such as "courage" and "honour" would evoke images of a noble loss such that the former way of considering war seemed, against this latter image, "feeble and stale." She could see war in both ways; as both glorious and terrible. However, having viewed

⁶⁵Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.101.

⁶⁶Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.90.

⁶⁷Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.167.

Picasso's "Guernica" she could, subsequently, only see war as terrible. The ambivalence had gone and she had one dominant picture of war.⁶⁸ She writes that,

All I am asserting, on the basis of an autobiographical example, is that visual art may create in us dominant images of reality, of how things are, where by 'of how things are' I do not mean merely 'of how things *visually* appear' but 'of how "things" - reality or life - may be thought of.'⁶⁹

This is a clear example of what I am talking about. Through seeing a picture one may have one's current way of looking at things changed. This change involves a change in one's beliefs. In the case of Hursthouse the change involves giving up the belief that war is glorious and maintaining, much more strongly, the belief that war is a terrible thing. Although Hursthouse does not write about whether this had an effect on her actions, it certainly seems possible that this change would bring about a different way of acting. One might, for example, become much more active in anti-war campaigning, much more vociferous in one's objection to war. To see things differently is, then, to change one's beliefs and, in changing one's beliefs, to come to live differently.

The role of the artist in a particular period is not necessarily limited to re-presenting the subject's view of herself or re-presenting the dominant way of seeing of that period. Painting can challenge with alternative ways of seeing. To transcend the dominant way of seeing the painter must simultaneously see himself as a painter in a way that denies the seeing of a painter.⁷⁰ The painter has to contest the norms of the art world that has formed him. One uses the same medium to ask a different question. Rather than painting in a way that represented wealth and prestige Rembrandt, in his "Self Portrait", painted at the end of his life, found the means to express the sense of the question of existence, a question diametrically opposed to the affirmation of wealth and luxury and social position.⁷¹

⁶⁸Hursthouse, R. "Truth and Representation." In Hanfling, Oswald, ed. *Philosophical Aesthetics. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1992. Pp.278-279.

⁶⁹Hursthouse. "Truth and Representation." P.279.

⁷⁰Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.110.

⁷¹Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. P.112. The point about Rembrandt painting this at the end of his life is that previously he had painted pictures within the dominant tradition. It was only at this later period of his life that he came to see the meaninglessness of life. Berger contrasts the Self Portrait with his earlier "Portrait of Himself and Saskia." In this work, writes Berger, Rembrandt is conforming to the conventions of the time. The painting is "an advertisement for the sitters good fortune."

We can say, in the case of the two examples given, that in these pictures we are presented with what seems to some people to be a “truth” about the way things are, a truth about reality or life. David Tracy articulates the notion of a “classic” where a classic discloses some compelling truth about our lives or concerning our existence. A classic presents a challenge to our current way of thinking and feeling about the world, our current way of seeing the world, and we are “*startled into thinking that something else may be the case.*”⁷² In experiencing a classic we may find an answer to those fundamental questions that arise as a result of perceiving the limits to our existence, limits revealed in fundamental questioning and in fundamental experiences such as experiences of awe, or wonder, or meaninglessness.⁷³ A classic may also serve to raise these questions for a subject who had not previously considered them.⁷⁴ The sorts of truths that Tracy has in mind are truths about our existence, the fundamental existential questions that concern us, questions given in what we perceive to be the limits to our experience.⁷⁵ That there is hope of finding answers to the fundamental questions that arise from perceiving the limits to our experience, is given in the fact that the classics are expressions of the experiences of those who have lived these fundamental questions of existence.⁷⁶

Tracy argues that our experience of a classic work of art is not the experience suggested by aesthetic theories. We do not, he says, in experiencing classic works of art, experience ourselves as subjects with certain tastes, appreciating, in a disinterested manner, the qualities of the work of art. Rather, the experience of a

⁷²Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.107. See also P.108 for further details concerning the Classic.

⁷³On the disclosure of God in the experience of the limits to our existence see Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.160. He argues that the religious dimension of experience is given in both the limit questions of, for example, science and in fundamental experiences of awe and wonder. One example would be, I think, “Why is there something rather than nothing.” It is also given in our experiences of dread and awe and wonder, those experiences that point beyond the everyday life world to something “other”. For the similar claim that the religious dimension of experience is given in the “limit” question “What is the purpose of existence as a whole?” see Smith, John E. *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1968. Ch.2. On limit experiences see Schutz and Luckmann. *The Structures of the Life World. Vol.II*. Ch. 6. These experiences and the questions that they raise are similar to those given by Tracy.

⁷⁴On the limits to existence or what Schutz refers to as the boundaries of the life world see Schutz, Alfred and Luckmann, Thomas. *The Structures of the Life World. Vol.II*. Translated by Richard M. Zaner and David J. Parent. Illinois: Northwestern University Press. 1983. Ch.6.

⁷⁵For Tracy on truth see Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. Pp.139, Footnote 35, Pp.160 and 168.

⁷⁶Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. Pp.124-130.

classic work of art is an experience in which we are “caught up” in the work of art, finding it shocking or revealing, and discovering a truth. Since Tracy is more eloquent than I am able to be, I quote what he has to say on this experience.

I do not experience a subject over against an object with my subjective consciousness in complete control. Rather, I experience myself caught up in a relationship with the work of art in such a manner that I transcend my everyday self-consciousness and my usual desires for control. In experiencing that actual internal relationship ... I experience the impact of a realized experience, an event character of truth into the essential that is real. I find I must employ words like “recognise” to describe the impact ... I am in the presence of a truth of recognition; the recognition of what is important, essential, real beyond distractions ...⁷⁷

After this experience our way of seeing things is transformed; we are no longer the same. We have had an experience that changes the way that we see things and this experience, although clearly demarcated from the rest of our experience, is integrated into this ongoing experience.⁷⁸ Experience, in its widest sense, is everything that happens to us, everything that we think, feel and undergo. It is ongoing and inchoate. Within experience in this first sense, there are clearly demarcated experiences, events or moments that have a clear beginning and a clear end, events that are sufficiently qualitatively different from the rest of our experience to justify the application of the term “an experience.” These experiences will be clearly remembered as distinct and qualitatively different and after having an experience of a work of art that has these characteristics, the world does not look the same. It has become changed for us.

Finally in this section, I return to the point that I made in the opening paragraphs that one’s entire way of seeing things or whole picture may be fundamentally changed. In the cases given above, one might accept the truths, if they are truths, contained within these pictures, and yet not adopt a different picture of the world. By this I mean that one would not come to have any fundamentally different framework propositions,

⁷⁷Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.112. Tracy is drawing upon and agreeing with Gadamer’s articulation of the experience of a work of art. See Gadamer, Hans Georg. *Truth and Method*. Second Revised Edition. Translated by Joel Wiensheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Sheed and Ward. 1989. Pp. 101-129. Gadamer uses the example of the experience of playing a game to articulate the experience of art. Gadamer’s own presentation of this idea is, in my opinion, very difficult. Tracy provides a very lucid explanation of Gadamer’s main points. The key to understanding the comparison is that in playing a game “the game becomes not an object over and against a self conscious subject but an experienced relational and releasing mode of being in the world distinct from the ordinary non playful one.” It is the nature of the experiences that are, in Gadamer’s estimation, analogous. Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.114.

⁷⁸Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. P.97. Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.110.

propositions taken for granted in a new way of seeing things. For example, one might accept that war is a terrible thing whilst maintaining, fundamentally, one's current way of looking at things. One will have acquired a new belief, a belief subject to further investigation and consideration, since there is a question whether war really is terrible, but no new framework propositions.⁷⁹ One might accept the truth, if it is a truth, that life is meaningless and empty and yet maintain, fundamentally, one's current way of looking at the world. I mean by this that the framework propositions by which one lives may not be altered. Believers, I will argue, have a completely different way of looking at things and to come to believe is to adopt a completely different way of looking at things. It is to live in terms of a new framework proposition or new framework propositions. Therefore, I want to give content to the idea of a person moving from one picture of the world to a different picture of the world. This I do by considering what might motivate a "leap" into a different way of looking at things.

The question we have, then, has to do with what would bring about a new way of seeing things, a new picture in terms of which one sees the world, where to have a new picture is to live in terms of a or some new framework propositions. Alfred Schutz refers to the suspicion of a fundamental inadequacy of the life worldly stock of knowledge and says,

This "suspicion", if it affects the various moments of the relative opacity of the life-world in general (mostly through the shock of crises not easily mastered), can motivate a "leap" into noneveryday provinces of reality. From these provinces the life worldly stock of knowledge can appear as completely insufficient. The world can become a mystery that becomes transparent only by means of knowledge superordinated to everyday reality - knowledge of a religious, philosophical or scientific kind.⁸⁰

There must be a motivation to leap into a non-everyday province of reality or, more exactly, to a province that is superordinated to everyday reality, and this motivation

⁷⁹On further investigation into the truths of what one has learned see Hursthouse. "Truth and Representation." P.295. She writes of these truths about "what life is like" that they are "immensely complicated and subtle." Whether they are truths is a question that has its place in conversation. On conversation see Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. Pp.383-388 and Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.101. This point that there are some truths, if indeed they are truths, that need to be discussed at length in conversation will be taken up again in the final chapter on coming to see that there is a God. The important point in conversation is, for my purposes, a willingness on the part of both partners in conversation to engage in joint reflection on the subject matter. Conversation does not take place without a genuine interest in the question.

⁸⁰Schutz, Alfred and Luckmann, Thomas. *The Structures of the Life World*. Vol.1. Translated by Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. London: Heinemann. 1974. P.171.

comes in the experience of a situation that we can not cope with in terms of our current picture of the world or in terms of questions that we can not answer in terms of the knowledge that we currently have. For example, a limit question is “Why is there something rather than nothing?” or “What is the meaning of life?” It will be our experiences that cause us to raise these questions. The question whether there is any meaning to life may arise from the pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with the emptiness of a culture that seems hollow, concerned with material gain, and lacking depth.⁸¹ This experience may raise a question that can not be answered in terms of one’s current picture of the world and bring about a different way of seeing things where this different way of seeing things does not consist of more knowledge to add to the knowledge of a subject but the adoption of a completely different way of seeing things.

In the terms that I have set out above, the subject acquires new framework propositions, new propositions that will be taken for granted in their new way of looking at the world. In the case of the religious world, there is something fundamental about the shift. One should not imagine, however, that this new picture is completely different from the previous picture.⁸² By this I mean that a person who comes to believe in God does not give up the framework propositions of the common sense attitude. These propositions remain in place. The subject does, however, acquire a new or some new framework propositions and new beliefs and they do act in a different way and it is in so doing that the fundamental framework propositions are presupposed within this picture.

⁸¹For a characterisation of the postmodern culture lacking depth see Lash, Scott. *Sociology of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge. 1990 Chs. 6 and 7. Of particular interest is Ch.7 which concerns the eclipse or end of aura in works of art. The eclipse of aura refers to the end of the work of art as set apart, distanced, and unique. Art has become popular and mainstream. This phenomenon is connected with the emergence of postmodern art, one characteristic of which is its “shallowness.” A further example would be what Lash refers to as mainstream postmodern cinema, characterised above all by spectacle and effect. See *ibid*. P.191. The reason I say that this is of interest is that one should not assume that art per se can afford the sort of experience given in Gadamer’s understanding of the experience of art. I wrote above that a characteristic of perceived truths about the way things are is that they are best considered in conversation and over a period of time. That we live in a shallow culture, lacking depth and meaning would be one such “truth.”

⁸²Hick, John. *Faith and Knowledge*. London: Macmillan. 1988. P.103.

1.6 Belief in God

John Hick rejects the analogy between aesthetic perception and religious experience. In discussing the idea that the religious interpretation of the world is rather like an aesthetic interpretation, that in both cases one is dealing with a different way of “*viewing and feeling about the world*”, Hick comes to the conclusion that the analogy holds only so far. The aesthetic analogy misses that which is most important in religious experience. The reason is that those who believe in God are making a truth claim that there is a God. Religious belief entails an ontological claim. Aesthetic judgements, according to Hick, do not. Aesthetic judgements, writes Hick, have to do with beauty and the judgements themselves assert that particular objects are beautiful; they do not necessarily claim that there is such a thing as beauty, existing as a Platonic essence.⁸³

Hick has missed the potential usefulness of considering aesthetic theory. He refers to and dismisses the work of John Wisdom who sees but does not develop this potential. Wisdom writes that two people may look at a natural scene and one may exclaim that it is beautiful whilst the other fails to see the beauty. Wisdom continues that,

... this reminds us of how we felt the theist accuse the atheist of blindness and the atheist accuse the theist of seeing what isn't there.⁸⁴

In the preceding sections I put in place a number of ideas, to be developed, concerning how it might be established that there is a God. I can now state the relation between these ideas. A person must be brought to see that there is a God. This process of bringing to see involves Sibley's techniques for bringing a person to see that a work of art has a particular quality. In bringing a person to see, the believer is offering a world picture or way of seeing. This way of seeing may be presented in a story or in a picture. This world picture is a challenge to the horizons of the enquirer, thought of in terms of Tracy's notion that a work of art can challenge one's current conceptions and present a radical alternative to one's current way of seeing. The process of coming to see

⁸³Hick. *Faith and Knowledge*. Pp.144-145. Penelhum also rejects the analogy with aesthetics on the grounds that art teaches us nothing about truth. See Penelhum, Terrence. *Religion and Rationality. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1971. P.171.

⁸⁴Wisdom. *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* P.158. For Hick on Wisdom see Hick. *Faith and Knowledge*. P.144.

differently consists of conversion from one's current way of seeing to a radically different way of seeing.⁸⁵ Terrence Penelhum writes that,

... religious experience, however defined, is of enormous consequence in bringing men to religious commitment and plays an important role in the lives that are framed within it. One might well ask why apologists, instead of appealing to it or attempting to induce it through preaching, so frequently try to dress their enterprise up in an inappropriate philosophical garb. Why should apologetics masquerade as metaphysics, when the religious record of metaphysics is so poor? Part of the answer lies in the fact that apologists, in seeking to claim an unattainable kind of rationality for the judgements they wish their hearers to make, fail to grasp fully the degree to which these judgements are actually made *in* the experiences they emphasize.⁸⁶

Fundamentally, and with the appropriate caveats, Penelhum is right about this issue. By the end of the thesis it will be clear, amongst other things, that a person who wishes to know whether or not there is a God must be brought to see that there is a God. They are brought to see that there is a God by being presented with a different picture of the world.

As Phillips recognises, any attempt to talk about God must be commensurate with the understanding of God from within the Christian way of looking at things. Philosophers who ask for evidence for the existence of God are, he writes, in the unfortunate position of enquiring into the existence of a God that is not the God of believers.⁸⁷ The following examples of religious experience are presented to support my thesis that God's reality is given either in experiences with which we can not cope in terms of our current picture of the world or in experiences that raise the limit questions concerning our existence. In giving their accounts these subjects can be understood as representing or expressing an alternative world picture or way of seeing. If asked how they know that God exists a person could reply only in terms of what looking at things in this way means to them. My first example is that of Tolstoy's experience. At about

⁸⁵Mavrodes, George I. "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. Pp.200-201.

⁸⁶Penelhum. *Religion and Rationality*. Pp.175-176.

⁸⁷Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.9. His reasoning is that it makes no sense to ask of the God or Scripture whether or not He exists and that since this is what those who ask for evidence are doing, they can not be asking about the same God. It will become clear in the rest of this thesis that I do not agree with him on this matter.

the age of fifty Tolstoy underwent a crisis in his life. At this time he had a family, materially speaking he was well off, he was respected and admired and yet he says,

I could give no reasonable meaning to any actions of my life. And I was surprised that I had not understood this from the very beginning. My state of mind was as if wicked and stupid jest were being played upon me by someone. One can live only so long as one is intoxicated, drunk with life; but when one grows sober one cannot fail to see that it is all a stupid cheat. What is truest about it is that there is nothing even funny or silly in it; it is cruel and stupid, purely and simply.⁸⁸

Tolstoy found life meaningless. There was, for Tolstoy, nothing of value in life, no reason for living. All of those things that usually give our lives meaning, such as prosperity and love and friendship did not, for Tolstoy make life meaningful. One can distinguish two ways in which life may have meaning; it may have cosmic meaning or terrestrial meaning. Terrestrial meaning is the meaning that one finds in one's life apart from the place of one's life in some overall divine scheme of things. Cosmic meaning is the meaning that one finds in one's life as a part of some overall divine or religious scheme.⁸⁹

It is a fact that some people, and possibly a very great number of people find life to be meaningless despite the various forms of terrestrial meaning that they find in their lives.⁹⁰ In other words, they feel that there must be something more to life and this something more may be found by placing their lives within a religious context. In the case of Christianity they may find meaning by coming to have faith in God. In each case their lives are placed within a larger context that makes their lives seem more meaningful. This is also made clear from the case of Tolstoy. Tolstoy says,

... whilst my intellect was working, something else was working in me too ... a consciousness of life, as I may call it, which was like a force which obliged my mind to fix itself in another direction and draw me out of my situation of despair ... During the whole course of this year, when I almost unceasingly kept asking myself how to end the business ... during all that time, alongside all of those movements of my ideas and observations, my heart kept languishing with another pining emotion. I can call this by no

⁸⁸Quoted in James. *Varieties*. P.160.

⁸⁹Levine, M.P. "What Does Death Have to do With the Meaning of Life?" *Religious Studies* 23 (1987).

⁹⁰On the pervasive need for meaning in our lives and the absence, for a great number of people of this meaning, See Frankl, Victor E. *Man's Search For Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy*. Translated by Ilse Lasch. London, Sydney, Auckland and Toronto. Hodder and Stoughton. Pp.98 and 108.

other name than that of a thirst for God. This craving for God had nothing to do with the movement of my ideas-in fact, it was the direct contrary of that movement-but it came from my heart. It was like a feeling of dread ... And this feeling of dread was mitigated by the hope of finding the assistance of someone.⁹¹

Looking at Tolstoy's experience we find a common feature of human experience; a sense of meaninglessness. In saying that it is a common feature of experience I do not mean that everyone finds life meaningless. Rather, it is common to a number of people. This sense of meaninglessness is one of a number of common features of our experience. In these experiences we come up against the limits to existence in the sense that these experiences seem to call for something more ultimate as an answer; a situation that points beyond itself to something greater.⁹² Tolstoy encountered God as the answer to the meaninglessness of his life. For Tolstoy, God's reality brought an end to his despair.⁹³

A person of Tolstoy's temperament may say that, without God, life is meaningless. It is empty and there is no point in living. In finding God, meaning is restored.⁹⁴ In Tolstoy's account of his conversion, we have the representation or expression of world picture or way of seeing. It is at this point that the notion of bringing a person to see that God exists becomes relevant. One can imagine an enquirer who does not find life to be meaningless. On the contrary they find that life is full, that all of the "mundane" pleasures more than suffice to give meaning to life. Sibley wrote that in order to bring a person to see the aesthetic quality, it might suffice just to point out that the work has the quality in question. In terms of belief in God, it might suffice just to point out that belief in God makes life more meaningful. A person reading Tolstoy may be struck by the similarities between Tolstoy's experience of the world and their own. In Tracy's terms, they may be caught up in Tolstoy's account of his own experience, and registering surprise that they had not "seen" this as the answer all along.

⁹¹James. *Varieties*. P.163.

⁹²I am drawing on Tracy who argues that from a phenomenological or descriptive point of view, the religious dimension of experience is disclosed in the limit questions. Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. Pp.160 and 164-165.

⁹³Smith. *Experience and God*. P.65. Smith argues that the object of faith is the one who ends the quest for a final purpose to life.

⁹⁴James. *Varieties*. Pp.189-190.

Often, however, this will not be the case. A person may not be caught up in Tolstoy's work. They may, in contradistinction, think immediately that Tolstoy was a neurotic and that several sessions on the psychologist's couch would have cured him of his neurosis. In this case, being presented with an experience will not bring a person to see that God exists. Something more will be needed and this something more can be elucidated using Sibley's procedures for bringing a person to see that a work has a certain aesthetic quality. I want to leave the case of bringing a person to see that God exists until the final chapter of the thesis. Tolstoy's case will suffice to introduce the notion of bringing a person to see that God exists.

In the case of Tolstoy, we can say that God's reality is given in his finding life more meaningful or meaningful per se and if we ask how he knows that God exists the answer is that the feeling of dread is mitigated. God's reality is not given in the same way for all people. This is an example taken from William James.

One Tuesday evening I sat in a saloon in Harlem, a homeless, friendless dying drunkard. I had pawned or sold everything that would bring a drink. I had not eaten for days and for four nights preceding I had suffered from delirium tremens, or the horrors from midnight till morning. I had often said, "I will never be a tramp. I will never be cornered, for when that time comes, if it ever comes, I will find a home in the bottom of the river." But the Lord so ordered it that when that time did come I was not able to walk one quarter of the way to the river, As I sat there thinking, I seemed to feel some great and mighty presence. I did not know then what it was. I did learn afterwards that it was Jesus, the sinner's friend. I walked up to the bar and pounded it with my fist till I made the glasses rattle. Those who stood by drinking looked on with scornful curiosity. I said I would never take another drink, if I died on the street, and really I felt as though that would happen before morning. Something said, "If you want to keep this promise, go and have yourself locked up." I went to the nearest station house and had myself locked up.

The story continues and he spends the night in the cell. The following Sunday morning he decides to go to a mission meeting and there he makes a decision to accept Jesus as his saviour. He says that,

Although up to that moment my soul had been filled with indescribable gloom, I felt the glorious brightness of the noonday sun shine into my heart. I felt I was a free man. Oh, the precious feeling of safety, of freedom, of resting on Jesus! I felt that Christ with all his brightness and power, had come into my life; that indeed old things had passed away and all things had become new.

“From that moment until now I have never wanted a drink of whiskey, and I have never seen money enough to make me take one. I promised God that night that if he would take away my appetite for strong drink, I would work for him all my life. He has done his part and I have ever been trying to do mine.”⁹⁵

Again God's reality is given in an encounter, in an experience in which the subject can no longer cope in terms of their current picture of the world. Examples could be multiplied from James' "The Varieties." The fundamental fact about coming to believe in God is that it involves, on the part of the subject, the recognition of the need for God, a need that is found in experiences in which one's current picture of the world is no longer adequate for coping with the world or in asking the limit questions about our existence.⁹⁶ The fundamental characteristic of coming to believe in God is finding one's current picture of the world inadequate and one of the fundamental characteristics of believing in God is that believing in God matters to those who do so believe. Believing in God is not, as Flew has in the past imagined, a case of entertaining a hypothesis in a disinterested manner and to come to believe in God is not to consider whether a hypothesis is tenable.⁹⁷ It is rather to come to have faith in God and to have faith is to respond to God, to ask for God's help, to thank and praise God, to pray to God. Faith is, in part at least, a cognitive act involving the adoption of certain beliefs. It is also perceived to be conative or the realisation of a capacity for God.⁹⁸

1.6 Conclusion

D.Z Phillips writes that if the philosopher is the "kind of atheist" for whom religious beliefs mean nothing then that philosopher will be unable to articulate the nature of religious belief.⁹⁹ Both William James and William Alston write that those who

⁹⁵James. *Varieties* . Pp. 205-207.

⁹⁶See also Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.164.

⁹⁷Flew, Anthony. "Theology and Falsification." In Flew and MacIntyre, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. 96-99.

⁹⁸On faith see Penelhum. *Problems of Religious Knowledge*. Ch.1 esp P.9 for a succinct statement of the way in which faith is understood in the Protestant tradition. See also Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion*. Ch.10 esp Pp.158-162.

⁹⁹Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.189.

challenge religious belief may be prejudiced against those beliefs.¹⁰⁰ Tracy writes that academics come to their subjects, as everyone else comes to a subject, with a history, with their own way of looking at things.¹⁰¹ Some make it clear that they have more than an academic interest in the question whether or not there is a God.¹⁰² Norman Malcolm writes of university people that they do not participate in religion and do not understand it.¹⁰³ My point is that there is, in the work of a number of the scholars that I will consider in the following chapters, a failure to articulate the significance, for the believer, of encountering God, a failure to argue for the rationality of religious belief in terms of the way in which God's reality is actually given in the life of the believer. The explanation for this omission is not of concern; the consequences of the omission are of importance. Penelhum, as we saw above, suggested that religious experience is of enormous importance in bringing a person to faith, suggesting that apologists should appeal to it rather than attempting to demonstrate the rationality of religious belief. The academic environment is not the place to appeal to religious experience in order to bring about faith in God. It is, however, the place to show that the significance of encountering God must be given central place in any defence of the rationality of religious belief.

My thesis is not an attempt to argue that there is a God but to show, most fundamentally, the way in which one comes to know that there is a God. If I am successful in this task, then those who argue that there must be sufficient evidence to support the belief that God exists, will come to see something that they did not see before.¹⁰⁴ Although the aim is not to show that there is a God, a philosophical position

¹⁰⁰James, William. *The Will To Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York and London: Longmans Green and Co. 1899. PP.13-14. Alston, William P. *Perceiving God. The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1991. P.31.

¹⁰¹Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. P.167.

¹⁰²See for example, Hepburn. Ronald W. *Christianity and Paradox*. London: Watts. 1958. P.1. Hare, R.M. in Flew and MacIntyre, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. P.103.

¹⁰³Malcolm. *The Groundlessness of Belief*. P.156.

¹⁰⁴Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. Pp.95-96.

may, as Phillips acknowledges, have the indirect effect of opening up the way to belief in God.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.190. Given the logic of my position, it could not be an attempt to show that there is a God. Given that to ask whether there is a God is not a theoretical question, philosophy can not answer the question "Does God Exist?" Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.181.

CHAPTER TWO

Our Passional Natures

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I characterised belief in God in terms of having a certain picture of the world, that is, as holding certain beliefs and having, as a framework proposition, belief in God. I suggested that to come to believe in God is to change one's current picture of the world, a process that involves, minimally, acquiring a new framework belief. God's reality is given in adopting the Christian way of looking at things. In this chapter I return to the evidentialist challenge to religious belief. There is certainly something wrong with the challenge as presented by Flew. He can only conceive of evidence in one way; propositional evidence for the existence of God and he makes belief in God wholly contingent upon having sufficient evidence of this sort, excluding any reference to what God's reality means in the life of the believer. It is a mistake to think of the question whether or not there is a God as a question to be decided wholly according to whether there is sufficient evidence, in Flew's sense, to support the belief that there is a God. It is a question to be decided in the life of the enquirer, in the whole of their experience and, particularly in what that belief would mean to them.

However, the role of evidence and argument, both in coming to believe in God and in belief in God, can not simply be dismissed. Only if we presuppose, as Phillips seems to presuppose, that argument and evidence have nothing to do with belief in God, can we reject, in toto, the evidentialist challenge. There are two reasons why I am not willing to presuppose that argument and evidence are irrelevant to belief in God. The first is that believers themselves do consider alternative explanations for their beliefs and they do come to give up their beliefs when, for example, the problem of evil in the world is pointed out to them. It is difficult, if not impossible, to give a coherent defence of the claim that a believer who thinks that the existence of evil counts against belief in God is making some kind of mistake about the logic of belief in God. Phillips is right that to believe in God is not to believe in an object, that belief in God is non-cognitive in that sense, in the sense that it makes no sense to enquire whether or not there is a God as though one might find God in the same way that one finds an apple

that one had lost.¹ We can accept this point about the logic of belief in God and say, still, that the existence of evil counts against belief in God and that believers themselves, within their way of looking at things, consider whether the existence of evil counts against their belief. Again, believers, and those with a serious concern whether there is a God, are aware that there are alternative explanations for belief in God and considering these alternative explanations does not entail making the mistake of thinking of God as an object.

As Hepburn sees, it is not a question of either argument and evidence or encountering God. There must be some middle ground.² This middle ground is given in Simone Weil's claim that questions about God are, for the believer, analogous to questions about the reality of the external world. Whilst questions about whether one might be deluded in believing in God seem to have, unlike questions about the reality of the external world, existential and not just theoretical import, this import is mitigated by the reality of God in the life of the believer, by what belief in God means to them.³ This point also explains why a subject who is seriously concerned with the question whether there is a God and who, nonetheless considers alternative arguments, need not necessarily be making the mistake of thinking of God as an object. One can conceive of these questions having their place within a fundamental concern with whether there is a God and of these alternative explanations as lived alternatives. The alternatives do not have to be conceived of in terms of attempts to show that an object either does or does not exist. Through reconceiving of evidence and argument in the light of an attitude in both the believer and the person who is seriously concerned with whether there is a God, we can avoid the extreme positions of both Flew and Phillips.

The second reason for not giving up the notion that argument and evidence have a place within the Christian world picture is that one needs an explanation of how our pictures change. Christianity, clearly enough, has changed quite considerably over the centuries, to the extent that some Christians now have fundamentally different

¹Phillips, D.Z. *Religion Without Explanation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1976. Pp.174-175.

²Hepburn, Ronald. *Christianity and Paradox. Critical Studies in Twentieth Century Theology*. London: Watts. 1958. P.30.

³For the Simone Weil quotation see Peterson, Michael; Hasker, William; Reichenbach, Bruce and Basinger David. *Reason and Religious Belief. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1991. P.117.

framework propositions.⁴ There is, I will argue, nothing esoteric about this change. It is the result of considering the beliefs of the Christian picture in relation to other beliefs that seem to conflict with the beliefs of this picture.⁵ When there is a conflict, some beliefs are given up or changed and when a sufficient number of the beliefs change, the framework propositions themselves change.⁶

In the first part of this chapter I explain in more detail what is meant by having sufficient evidence and show that there are reasons to think that, in practical terms, the demand for sufficient evidence is one that can not be met. Next I give more content to the notion of coming to see that there is a God by elucidating upon the relationship between this process and the subject. Once again, I will make it clear that the potential significance of belief in God in the life of the enquirer is an integral part of the process of coming to see that there is a God. I then defend the idea that believers are justified in believing in God using the distinction between normative and evaluative justification and the claim, already introduced in chapter one, that it is not self evident that the epistemic principle that evidence is truth conducive holds all of the time. If there is a God, then God is to be encountered and God's reality is given in a way of looking at things. If believers are to justify their belief in God, then, I will argue, this is the way in which they must do it. Although Phillips conceives of belief in God as groundless, as not standing in need of justification or grounds, and as being given in the life of believers, in their experience rather than based upon it, one can still conceive of using the notion of belief in God being justified for the believer. In the final sections I take up the two

⁴I am thinking in particular here of the position of John Hick who, whilst maintaining that he is a Christian, has given up belief in God. Hick conceives of all representations of the Ultimate reality as phenomenal representations of a noumenal reality. See, for example, Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: Macmillan. 1989. Chs.14-16. One can compare Hick's belief on this matter with, for example, Alvin Plantinga who conceives of God as a person, arguing that belief in God necessarily involves the existential claim that God, as conceived, exists. See Plantinga, Alvin. "Reason and Belief in God." In Plantinga, Alvin and Wolterstorff, Nicholas, eds. *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1991. Pp.18-19.

⁵In chapter one I distinguished between a world picture and a conceptual schema, writing that a conceptual schema should be understood more narrowly as a specific system of beliefs or as a portion of a person's whole way of looking at things. We should conceive of a conflict between beliefs as a conflict between the beliefs of two conceptual schemas. For example, as a conflict between the religious and scientific conceptual schema. Runzo, Joseph. *Reason, Relativism and God*. London: Macmillan. 1986. Footnote 51, P.75.

⁶See Phillips, D.Z. *Faith After Foundationalism*. London: Routledge. 1988. Pp.62-63.

points from the introduction concerning the relation between a picture of the world and argument and evidence.

2.2 Sufficient Reason

In this section and the next, I will argue that there are three fundamental problems with Flew's challenge. First, that the demand that we believe only where we have sufficient evidence to warrant or justify the belief places a demand upon us which, in practical terms, can not be carried out. Secondly, that the demand that we believe only when the evidence justifies the belief ignores the fact that we are not reasoning machines. We have, as James notes, *passional natures: hopes and desires and fears and concerns*.⁷ Finally, and most significantly, Flew's position on belief in God actually rules out, as not significant to the question how one knows that there is a God, any appeal to the way in which the believer does know God as a reality in their own lives; as the reality met in their hopes and desires, their fears and concerns, their wonder and awe.

There are two possible interpretations of what Flew might mean by having sufficient evidence. On the one hand the notion of sufficient evidence seems to point to a concept of statistical probability such that a person could only be rational in believing that God exists if they had carried out a project similar to that of Richard Swinburne. That is, when all the relevant evidence has been considered it must be the case that it is statistically more probable than not that God exists where "more probable" is given content in terms of a numerical value.⁸ This is indicated by Flew's references to having an exact balance of evidence or more evidence for the proposition that God exists than against it. It would seem that this is what Flew has in mind from his claim that if the evidence for the existence of God is equal or ambiguous, then the right thing to do is to suspend judgement. In this context Flew refers to having a "*perfect balance of evidence*." A "*perfect balance of evidence*" should not lead one to conclude

⁷James, William. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York, London and Bombay: Longmans Green and Co. 1899. P.9.

⁸Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1991.

that belief and disbelief are both equally reasonable such that one could choose either option. The rational person will suspend judgment.⁹

In terms of giving content to this first notion of having sufficient evidence, that is of having a balance of evidence, I would suggest that there must be, on balance, more evidence for the belief that God exists than for the belief that God does not exist. The only way to give meaningful content to the notion of a perfect balance of evidence, or to having slightly more evidence for the existence of God than against the existence of God, is in terms of a position similar to that which Swinburne believes that he has established. That is, when *all* the available evidence has been considered, it must be the case that there is slightly more evidence for the existence of God than against the existence of God.¹⁰ That is, the hypothesis that God exists is "*rendered probable by the total evidence available to us, all we know about the world, not just some limited piece of knowledge.*"¹¹ Swinburne's argument for the existence of God is concerned with numerical probability and concludes that theism is more probable than not.¹² The question here is not whether Swinburne has succeeded but a question of whether it is reasonable to expect a believer, even an intellectually capable believer, to have evidence in this sense. Do we really want to claim that unless a believer knows that

⁹Flew. *God and Philosophy*. P.194. See also Scriven, Michael. *Primary Philosophy*. New York and London: McGraw Hill, Inc. 1966. P.105 and Sessions, William Lad. "Religious Faith and Rational Justification," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 13 (1982):147. Commenting on William James' essay "The Will To Believe," Joseph Runzo, suggests that it may be rational to act as though proposition P were true, even though not-p has a "moderate preponderance" of evidence in its favour. He fails to question the notion that we could ever know, in the case of belief in God, whether there is a preponderance of evidence in favour of the proposition that God exists. Runzo, Joseph. *Reason, Relativism and God*. London: Macmillan. 1986. P.204. For the interested reader, it is not clear to me that William James thinks in terms of a balance of evidence. The option between two hypotheses must be live and this appears to be contingent upon two facts. First, the relation between the thinker in a social situation and the hypothesis in question. Secondly, it must be the case that the belief does not appear to be an absurdity and this seems to be contingent upon the issue not having been decided by the literature on the issue. See James. *The Will To Believe*. Pp.2,15 and 29. Caroline Franks Davis notes that Mackie mistakenly reads James as arguing that there must be a balance of evidence both for and against belief in God. See Franks Davis, Caroline. "The Devotional Experiment," Religious Studies 22 (1986):21. William P. Alston also discusses the choice between believing and not believing in God in terms of there being an equal balance of evidence. Alston, William P. *Epistemic Justification. Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1989. Pp.123-124. See below on Alston and choosing to believe.

¹⁰See Sessions. "Religious Faith and Rational Justification," Pp.147. Sessions is giving content to the claim of W.K. Clifford that belief ought to be exactly and solely proportioned to the evidence.

¹¹Swinburne. *The Existence of God*. Pp.14-15.

¹²Swinburne. *The Existence of God*. P.291.

there is, on balance, more evidence in this sense, for than against the existence of God, that believer must give up their belief in God?

However, Flew's work also suggests a notion of sufficient evidence in terms of a convincing argument for the existence of God. A person who had a convincing argument for the existence of God, would not be in a position of having, on balance, more evidence for than against the existence of God. If, for example, a believer has what seems to them to be a convincing argument from religious experience, they cannot be said to have a balance of evidence in favour of the existence of God. They just have one convincing argument. Flew writes that the believer must have "*... sufficient reason of some sort for believing in God if that belief is not to stand out as wholly arbitrary and irrational.*"¹³ If a person carried out Swinburne's project then we might say that it is, in principle, possible for them to have a perfect balance of evidence or to know that they have slightly more evidence for the belief that God exists than against that belief. However, if we refer to a person having sufficient reason of some sort, then no content can be given to the idea of a perfect balance of evidence. A person in this position would not be able to say that the total evidence warrants them in believing that God exists but only that the particular argument that they have considered warrants them in believing that God exists and if evidence is important, then a belief based on one argument would not seem to be justified to a very great degree. Secondly, to be in a position of maintaining that it is a sufficient reason, the subject in question would still have to be extremely sophisticated, countering a whole host of objections to the claim that it is a sufficient reason of some sort. Although the task facing either the enquirer or the believer would not be as great as that of attempting, per impossible, to come to the conclusion, for themselves, that the evidence is either equal or ambiguous, it would, nonetheless be a formidable task.

Flew gives content to his second notion of having sufficient reason of some sort in terms of having a proof for the existence of God. Flew is not concerned with the traditional proofs for the existence of God on the grounds that they have been shown not to work.¹⁴ He is using the word proof to mean an argument from other propositions

¹³Flew. *God and Philosophy*. P.164.

¹⁴On the failure of traditional proofs see Smart, J.J.C. "The Existence of God." In Flew, Anthony and MacIntyre, Alasdair, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. London: SCM Press Ltd. 1955.

believed to the conclusion which is established with some degree of probability. Flew is concerned with an inductive argument which would make the existence of God more probable than not.¹⁵ The sense of proof that we want is one that is congruous with the degrees of evidence for the existence of God ranging from slightly more evidence for the existence of God than against the existence of God, in which case the believer would be justified to some degree in believing that God exists, to the degree of evidence where the existence of God is overwhelmingly probable because there is far more evidence for than against the existence of God.¹⁶ Penelhum writes that a successful proof is one in which the conclusion is shown to have the highest degree of probability or likelihood and that, "*While this is a notion which may well defy definition, it is entirely familiar.*"¹⁷ That is, we can not give the probability in question a numerical value. We can, however, give some content to the notion of a conclusion being "extremely likely". The first is that we, as humans, see that the conclusion is extremely likely, that it is worthy of belief or that it is rational for us to accept the conclusion. The objective component has to do with seeing that there is a connection between the evidence and the proposition.¹⁸ Although we cannot give an account of this kind of probability in terms of numerical probability, it is clear, as Penelhum says, that we are familiar with it. We can see, in a large number of cases, which is the approvable belief and we see this in accordance with the effect that evidence has on a sound understanding.¹⁹

¹⁵Flew. *God and Philosophy*. Pp.164-165. On the conditions for a proof see Penelhum, Terrence. *Problems of Religious Knowledge*. London: Macmillan. 1971. Pp.37-38.

¹⁶Justification comes in degrees. If one conceives of being justified in terms of having evidence, then if there is on balance considerably more evidence for than against proposition p, subject s is justified to a high degree in believing that p. If there is only slightly more evidence for than against the proposition that p, then the degree of justification is, for subject s, not as great. In the evidentialist conception of holding beliefs, assent ought to be proportioned to evidence. One should not believe proposition p with a great deal of conviction if the evidence does not justify this. The belief that p should be held tentatively. See Plantinga, Alvin. "Reason and Belief in God." In Plantinga, Alvin and Wolterstorff, Nicholas, eds. *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1991. P.49. Also Wolterstorff, Nicholas. "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?" In Plantinga and Wolterstorff., eds. *Faith and Rationality*. P.136.

¹⁷Penelhum. *Problems of Religious Knowledge*. P.38.

¹⁸See Chapter one on the explanatory connectedness requirement.

¹⁹See Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. PP.159-168. This is the explanation for why we do not have direct control over our beliefs. To look for evidence so to something to bring it about that we do believe a proposition. We can not directly choose to

The philosopher or theologian might build an argument from religious experience using the principle of credulity.²⁰ The principle of credulity states that it is a principle of rationality that, in the absence of reason to doubt, "*what one seems to perceive is probably so.*" The principle is applied to religious believers in the following way. In the absence of reason to doubt, if it seemed to a person that they had an experience of God then they probably did have an experience of God. Having an experience in which it seems that a person encountered God is, for that person, in the absence of reason to doubt, *prima facie* evidence that God exists. It is then up to the skeptic to show that there are good reasons to doubt that the experience was an experience of God. We can set out the argument to do with the principle of credulity as follows.

- 1.Experiences occur which their subjects take to be experiences of God.
 - 2.When subjects have an experience which they take to be of an X, it is rational to conclude that they really do experience X unless we have some positive reasons to think their experiences are delusive.
 - 3.There are no good, positive reasons for thinking that all or most experiences which their subjects take to be of God are delusive.
- therefore,
- 4.It is rational to believe that at least some experiences which their subjects take to be of God really are of God.
- therefore,
- 5.It is rational to believe that God exists.²¹

A person who wished to challenge this argument might do so in terms of either the second or the third premise. In presenting the argument, William Rowe questions the nature of religious experience asking whether content can be given to the notion of experiencing God. He says, however,

believe but we can bring it about indirectly that we do believe. Our belief is "determined" by the evidence available. On control over our beliefs see further below.

²⁰Swinburne. *The Existence of God*. P.254. Broad, C.D. *Philosophy, Religion and Psychical Research*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1953. P.197.

²¹Rowe, William. "Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982):87.

... I shall allow that if there is a God then there may be an experience in which God is indeed the object of experience.²²

He makes this point as though it has no bearing on whether a person would accept the third premise of the argument but it does, of course, have a very important bearing on the question whether a person would accept the third premise. Flew, as I have already said, questions whether religious experience really is a kind of perception and a being in a position to know.²³ If challenged a believer would need to defend the claim that it is possible to experience God and this in itself would be a formidable task. Therefore, whichever way one conceives of the notion of sufficient reason, an intellectually capable subject would have to do a lot to know whether they were in the position of having sufficient evidence.

Most people are incapable of holding their belief that God exists on sufficient evidence in either of the sense given above. Following the evidentialist line of thought, the majority of believers must immediately give up their belief in God. If we think, first of all, in terms of numerical probability, then it would be only philosophers and theologians, and only a limited number of those, who would be capable of being in a position of having sufficient evidence in this sense. Richard Swinburne would be in the position to hold the belief that God exists on sufficient evidence but Richard Swinburne is an academic philosopher. This means first that he possesses a capacity for research and for understanding that the majority of the population do not possess. It means secondly that, compared to the majority of the population, Swinburne has the time and relatively easy access to the relevant resources to assess the evidence for and against the existence of God. Swinburne is in a privileged position; a person such as Swinburne can, in principle anyway, equate assent to evidence. For the sake of argument, let us say that he has managed to assess all of the available evidence and that he is correct in his belief that it is more probable than not that God exists. In relation to the evidentialist challenge, Swinburne would be in a good position. Assent ought to be equated to evidence and if he is correct there is more evidence for traditional theism than against traditional theism. He has, therefore, the right to believe but not to believe strongly since the evidence does not warrant this. Most people do not have the

²²Rowe. *“Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity.”* P.88.

²³Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism.* P.26.

intellectual capacity and lack the time and resources to make the judgement that he has made. This means is that it is not reasonable to demand that everyone equate assent to evidence. It cannot be reasonable to demand something that the vast majority of the population are incapable of doing.

If we take the second notion of having sufficient reasons of some sort, then once again we find that most of the people most of the time do not and cannot have sufficient reason to support their belief in God. Even if we allow that the believer is familiar with one of the two arguments given above, the credulity principle, such that they reply to Flew, contra the presumption of atheism, that it is in fact up to the enquirer to show why the believer is not justified in believing in God, a sophisticated objector will have no difficulty in at least raising issues of doubt. They may, in fact, not be particularly telling reasons to doubt but in order to frame an adequate reply the believer will have to be familiar with a number of sophisticated alternative explanations for religious experience. If faced with a philosopher who raises these objections and if unable to reply adequately then the believer will not have sufficient reason because what they took to be sufficient reason will have been undermined.

If we take the case of a person who is not intellectually capable, it would seem that they must give up their belief since they do not have sufficient reason to justify that belief. Can we not say, however, that, whether we conceive of sufficient reason as numerical probability or a good argument, the believer need not actually carry out the project of assessing all the available evidence? Richard Swinburne has carried out this project and the believer can appeal to the work of Richard Swinburne in support of their belief that God exists. It might be thought that the "ordinary" person need not assess the evidence. A person can appeal to the authority of those who do have the time and the ability to decide these questions.²⁴ A person who had recourse to, for example, the work of Richard Swinburne, would not know for herself that there is more evidence for than against the existence of God. Such a person would be in the position that William James characterises as a common one in terms of holding our beliefs. That is, the belief that there is more evidence for than against the existence of God would be one held on what one takes to be the authority of another.²⁵

²⁴Blanshard, Brand. *Reason and Belief*. London: George Allen and Unwin. 1974. Pp.430-431.

²⁵James. *The Will To Believe*.. P.9.

If there were a consensus of opinion on the issue, then this would be a way of finding out whether or not there is sufficient evidence to warrant the claim that there is a God. However, the only point that academic philosophers do seem to agree upon is that the traditional proofs have failed.²⁶ On other matters, there is no agreement. For example, let us say that our inquirer has found that, according to Swinburne, there is more evidence for than against the existence of God. The enquirer refers to the work of Anthony Flew and finds the opinion that the concept of God is incoherent and that evidence for the existence of God is lacking.²⁷ Our enquirer might turn to consider what Hick has to say on the conflict between the religious and non-religious interpretations of the universe and there he would find the claim that the "evidence" is interpreted in accordance with one's prior commitment and that, on the basis of this commitment, the arguments for the existence of God have appeared convincing to some and unconvincing to others.²⁸ If they were to go to J.J.C. Smart they would be told that knowing God is a question of conversion not of logical proof and that to try to prove the existence of God is "*an absurdity born of ignorance of the logic of our language.*"²⁹ O.K. Bouwsma argues that there cannot in fact be evidence for the existence of God.³⁰ This brief indication of the diversity of views concerning both the coherence of the concept of God and the evidence for the existence of God supports the point made by William James that, "... if we repair to our libraries what disagreement do we discover!"³¹

²⁶Scriven. *Primary Philosophy*. Pp.87-88. Rowe, William. "Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* (1982):89. Findlay, J.N. "Can God's Existence Be Disproved." In Flew, Anthony and MacIntyre, Alasdair. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. London: SCM Press. 1963. P.47. Hughes, G.E. in *ibid*. P.57. Flew. *God and Philosophy*. P.164. Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: Macmillan. 1989. P.226.

²⁷Flew. *God and Philosophy*. Chapter 2.

²⁸Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.226. See further below on commitment and evidence.

²⁹Smart, J.J.C. "The Existence of God." In Flew and MacIntyre, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. 1955. P.40.

³⁰Bouwsma, O.K. *Without Proof or Evidence. Essays of O.K. Bouwsma*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. 1984. Pp.7-9.

³¹James. *The Will To Believe*. P.15.



Blanshard is aware that consensus of opinion may be lacking but argues that, in seeking the authority of others, one has a responsibility to choose carefully.³² This seems, on the face of it, an acceptable strategy. It would, given the task in hand, seem better to choose to listen to an academic philosopher or theologian than to a person wholly uninformed on the matter of evidence for the existence of God but once one has made that decision, how is one to decide which of the academic philosophers or theologians is to choose as one's guide? How would the person whom Blanshard refers to as the "plain man" decide whether to listen to Flew or to Hick? Would, for example, such a person have to enquire into the backgrounds of the various philosophers, perhaps making a decision according to seniority or position held, numbers of publications, class of first degree, opinion of peers? The choice would appear to be impossible. Therefore, a decision on the issue of evidence can not be made on the basis of choosing to be guided by an academic philosopher.

The further problem is the internalist component of justification.³³ It is difficult to give content to the notion of a person appealing to the authority of others. In the context of argument and evidence we expect more than an appeal to authority. There would be something strange about being justified in believing that p but not being able to say what it is that justifies one's belief that p or that God exists. The one who is doing the believing must have access to the grounds that justify the belief. The reason for this is the intuitive notion that the reason that we are concerned with justifying our beliefs is that we have a practice of critical reflection, of answering objections to beliefs or arguing and so on. If we were to maintain this, however, we would have to accept the position that was rejected above. Further, even if we did allow that subject s can appeal to the opinions of others, such an appeal would show only that there is not sufficient reason, in either of Flew's senses of sufficient reason, to justify belief in God. Flew's position, given that there is insufficient evidence of the sort that he requires, is that one should not come to believe in God and that one ought to give up one's belief in God.

³²Blanshard. *Reason and Belief*. P.431.

³³Alston, W.P. *Epistemic Justification. Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1989. Pp.107 and 233. Sessions, William Lad. "Religious Faith and Rational Justification," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982):144 and footnote 4, P.153. He discusses a definition of evidence in terms of actual and potential evidence.

Before I consider a reply to the evidentialist challenge, that one has the right to believe in God if the evidence will not decide the issue, I want to discuss the second problem with Flew's conception of having sufficient evidence. This problem is that he conceives of the assessment of evidence as a process which occurs in a wholly theoretical and detached attitude. We are not reasoning machines and do not live our lives and hold our beliefs in accordance with what the propositional evidence justifies. The assessment of evidence is not, and in the case of belief in God, should not be considered as an abstract and theoretical enterprise consisting wholly of a search for a good argument for the existence of God. Our beliefs are not held only in terms of the effect of evidence on a sound understanding but in terms of what these beliefs mean to us. Reasoning about God can be thought of as a process in which the individual "*figures essentially*" in the process of reasoning.³⁴ Thinking of reasoning in this way, mitigates the charge that one is making God into an object to be discovered at the end of a chain of reasoning. The question whether there is a God is not being decided in terms of an abstract argument but in terms of an individual attempting to make sense of her experience as a person, with hopes and fears and anxiety and wonder. Alternative explanations are not to be understood as abstract arguments to do with whether an object exists but as possibilities for the life of the enquirer.

If we posit a mature and intellectually capable individual, with a more than theoretical concern in believing in God, who understands and accepts Phillips' point that belief in God is non-cognitive, in the sense that to believe in God is not to believe that there is an object like other objects, who understands that God's reality is given in a way of looking at the world but who, nonetheless, finds there to be difficulties with coming to believe in God, then argument and evidence would seem to have some place in coming to believe in God. Phillips would maintain that such a person is making a mistake about the logic of belief in God, that such a person has misunderstood the epistemological status of belief in God. To look for evidence is, he would say, to make the mistake of thinking that one could establish that God exists in the same way that one establishes the existence of a mundane object. However, just as believers can, without conceiving of God as an object like other objects, wonder about whether they might not be mistaken in their picture of the world, so a person genuinely interested in

³⁴Smith, John E. *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1968. Pp.111-114.

belief in God can, without conceiving of God as an object, wonder whether that picture might not be mistaken. I am, therefore, maintaining a distinction between the ground for belief in God and critical thinking about belief in God. Belief in God is grounded in encounter with God; it is not grounded in propositional evidence that supports the belief that God exists.

2.3 Willing to Believe

In this section I take up the third and final point that I made about Flew's challenge; that he excludes any appeal to the way in which God is given as a reality in the life of the believer. This fact is set within the context of elucidating further the process of coming to see that there is a God. We have seen that the process of coming to see that there is a God is a process which necessarily involves the whole self. In this section I given content to how we are to understand this process. I argue that in coming to see that there is a God, the subject is not making a decision to either believe or not believe. Rather the whole person is involved in a process, the outcome of which may be an encounter with God. It is not a case of deciding to believe a proposition but of a process in which God becomes a reality in the life of the enquirer. I wrote above that, in the case of the evidentialist challenge, the ideal is that the result of considering the evidence has an effect on the understanding of the subject. In this case, the case of coming to see that there is a God, it is not a matter just of the effect of evidence on the understanding but a process which necessarily involves, from the outset, the whole person, their passional nature as well as their intellect. Belief in God is not an option in which that belief is contingent wholly upon the effect of evidence on the understanding but an option "decided" also in terms of one's passional nature. In order to avoid the objection that this process that I am describing does not accord with what we actually know we must remember that we are dealing with an intellectually capable subject. Whilst Smith may be right that this is not the way in which most people come to believe in God, everyone is different and it certainly seems possible that there be an intellectually capable subject who needs to believe in God, in the sense that they find life to be meaningless or have raised questions that point to the limits our existence,

and, yet find it impossible to so believe because they are concerned about, for example, what seems to evidence against the existence of God.³⁵

There is nothing incoherent in the notion of subject s suspending judgement due to intellectual considerations; the situation is logically possible. Secondly, it certainly seems possible in a psychological sense for a subject to do this.³⁶ According to Smith, belief in God is not a “pure option” to be determined according to the available evidence or, in Flew’s terms, on the merits of what is said in the debate. This is not, he writes, the way in which people do come to believe in God. People come to believe in God after having certain experiences or having raised limit questions.³⁷ However, we do not have to conceive, in the case of the intellectually capable subject, of their thinking of belief in God as a pure option to be decided on the merits of what is said in the debate. We may think of their willing nature, in James’s sense of willing nature as essentially involved in the question whether there is a God.³⁸

Alston notes that Chisholm thinks in the same way as Flew; that is, of a person considering a proposition to be believed, considering the evidence both for and against

³⁵Belief control is usually discussed in the context of the normative deontological concept of epistemic justification. On a normative deontological concept of epistemic justification, we have a duty to conform to a certain standard, in this case the standard being that of having sufficient evidence. The idea that this is something that we can just “see”, that is that this is obvious, is rooted in an appeal to a God-given nature. I take it that the evidentialist objector such as Flew could not ground the obvious propriety of this way of forming beliefs in an appeal to a God-given nature. See Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Pp.11-19. The issue is itself complicated by the fact that the duty is conceived of in different ways. For example, that we have this duty may be based on an argument that this is a moral duty. See further on this below. Those who reject the normative deontological conception of epistemic justification do so on the grounds that our beliefs are not within our control and, therefore, that we can not be held responsible for them.

³⁶There is general agreement that we have some sort of control, usually termed indirect control, over the formation of our beliefs, that we can train ourselves to be critical, to weigh up evidence, to avoid gossip. Thus, whilst we may not be able to bring it about directly that we believe that p, we can take certain measures to ensure that we are sufficiently critical. Having been sufficiently critical we find ourselves believing the proposition in question. We have not brought it about directly by an act of will that we believe that p. See further below on direct control over our beliefs. On this indirect control see Alston, William P. *Epistemic Justification. Essays in Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1989. Pp.133-142. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. P.24. Blanshard, Brand. *Reason and Belief*. London: George Allen and Unwin. 1974. Pp.402-404. Wolterstorff, Nicholas. “Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?” In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. P.155.

³⁷Smith writes of the idea that a person estimates the probability that there is a God before deciding to believe that it “runs counter to experience.” He concurs that the question of belief in God is raised as a fundamental concern. See Smith, John E. “Faith, Belief and the Problem of Rationality in Religion.” In Delaney, C.F., ed. *Rationality and Religious Belief*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1979. P.57.

³⁸On willing nature see James. *The Will To Believe*. P.9.

that proposition and then choosing to either believe or not to believe the proposition in question in accordance with what the evidence will allow. Alston writes that, “*I find this assumption of direct voluntary control over belief quite unrealistic.*”³⁹ Similarly, William James writes of the notion that we will to believe a proposition that it seems “*simply silly.*”⁴⁰ Alston’s point is that having considered the evidence, we are not free to choose either to believe or not to believe. Rather, once we have seen which way the evidence counts, our “decision” is determined by the evidence.

In a number of cases, cases in which the belief is either obviously true or obviously false, we can not choose to either assent or withhold assent. Alston understands this ability to choose to either believe or not believe in terms of having direct voluntary control over one’s beliefs. If for example a proposition is a candidate for belief then the ability to choose to believe it would be the ability to “... *switch propositional attitudes toward that proposition just by deciding to do so.*”⁴¹ In a number of cases it seems clear that we do not have that kind of ability. In a number of cases this idea does seem “*simply silly.*” Consider, for example, the cases that William James gives. He writes that we can not just bring it about that we believe that Abraham Lincoln’s existence is a myth.⁴² The reason for this is clear enough. This strikes us immediately as a proposition that is obviously false. That is the explanation for why we can not choose to believe it is that we know immediately that it is false.

Our inability to choose to believe is not restricted to cases of propositions that are obviously false. For a number of beliefs that we are inclined to accept we do not have this sort of control. For example, if one sees a car coming down the road then one’s belief that there is a car coming down the road is not within one’s direct control. One just finds oneself believing that there is a car coming down the road. When one sees a tree or when one looks at the sky and sees that it is blue, one’s belief that one

³⁹Alston, William P. *Epistemic Justification. Essays in the Theory of Knowledge.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1989. P.91.

⁴⁰His second argument is that the notion of simply choosing to believe seems “vile” since, from the evidentialist point of view, one ought to consider the evidence available and come to believe in accordance with the evidence. James. *The Will to Believe.* P.7.

⁴¹Alston. *Epistemic Justification.* P.122.

⁴²James. *The Will to Believe.* P.4. All the other examples of candidates for belief are propositions that are clearly false.

sees a tree and one's belief that the sky is blue are not beliefs that are directly within one's control. One just finds oneself believing that there is a tree and that the sky is blue. There are some beliefs that we cannot help having. One does not, in fact, choose to form these beliefs and one could not, in fact, choose to refrain from believing them.⁴³ Once again, however, belief in God is not of this sort. In the previous case we were dealing with beliefs that were obviously false. In this case, assuming the absence of reason to doubt or assuming ideal conditions, we are dealing with cases of beliefs that are obviously true. In both cases the belief is "determined" by the sense of certainty.⁴⁴ In addition, these are examples in which the subject has no significant interest in the belief in question. Having surveyed the field of obviously true and obviously false beliefs Alston writes that, "*It seems clear ... that ... decisions, or choosings don't hook up with anything in the way of propositional attitude inauguration.*"⁴⁵

The reason that he can come to such a conclusion is that he has chosen examples of beliefs that are either obviously true or obviously false. The important point, from the perspective of Flew's enquirer, is that belief in God is not of this sort. Alston recognises the force of this objection to the sorts of examples that he has given. He acknowledges that, in the case of religious belief and philosophical positions, we are dealing with cases of belief that are not either obviously true or obviously false. He refers, in cases such as this, to a radical "*under determination of evidence.*"⁴⁶ Flew, as we know, argues that in the case where the evidence will not justify the belief the right thing to do is suspend judgement but, putting aside this point for one moment, if a person did "decide" to believe in God having made themselves aware that philosophers have not decided the issue, then what sort of a decision would this be? Alston maintains that it would not be decision to believe that there is a God and his grounds for doing so are that, just as in the case of obviously true and obviously false propositions, we can not just choose to believe a proposition when the evidence is ambiguous.

⁴³These examples are employed by both Plantinga and Alston. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. P.24. Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. Pp.91-92 and Pp.122-123.

⁴⁴Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. P.125.

⁴⁵Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. P.122.

⁴⁶Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. P.92.

If the evidence is ambiguous, writes Alston, we are no more able to choose to believe than if the belief were obviously true or obviously false. In the case of ambiguous evidence, the belief is determined by the way in which we see the evidence and at that moment one is no more able to accept the alternative than in the previous cases considered. We can not choose to believe an opposed belief if it seems to us that the weight of evidence is, if only slightly, in favour of one of the beliefs.⁴⁷ What can we say, however, of a case in which we do not know which way to take the evidence? In this case Alston can not appeal to the fact that the subjective probability of the belief that p will determine the formation of the belief in question. In these cases, writes Alston, cases where a decision seems to be made, this is not a decision to believe that p but a resolve to act in a certain way, a resolve in the face of the need to decide one way or the other. One decides to act as though the belief in question were true.⁴⁸ It should be clear how much Alston's position owes to William James' argument that when intellectual considerations will not decide an issue, subject s has the right to believe in accordance with her passional nature, where this decision to believe is understood as a decision to act in a way to realise a truth.⁴⁹ I wish to qualify this by saying that the process of coming to see that there is a God is a process of realising a truth that necessarily involves both the intellect and the willing nature. It is, for a serious enquirer, always and already a course of action or a process which necessarily involves considering arguments and evidence but also a process which involves the willing nature. The outcome may be encounter with God as the realisation of a significant interest in the question whether or not there is a God. The subject is not deciding to either believe or not believe that there is a God by considering the evidence and then deciding to undertake a course of action to realise a truth. Rather the process is from the start a process in which the reasoning is related to the life of the subject. It is not a

⁴⁷Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. Pp.123-124.

⁴⁸Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. Pp.126-127.

⁴⁹See particularly James. *The Will To Believe*. Pp.23-25. In chapter one I wrote that the evidentialist sees the avoidance of error as more important than the pursuit of truth. William James saw the pursuit of truth as more important than the avoidance of error, arguing that one has the right to believe in accordance with one's passional nature as long as intellectual considerations had not decided the issue. James. *The Will to Believe*. Pp.18-19. Here he rejects the maxim that it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence. John Hick notes that James's essay should be more appropriately entitled "The Right to Believe" since it has to do with the right to believe in the absence of sufficient evidence. Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: Macmillan. 1989. P.227.

question of a formal process of reasoning but of all that belief in God would mean for the subject, a question of the difference that belief in God would make in the life of the subject.

Anthony Flew denies the legitimacy of believing when the evidence will not decide the issue and he excludes, in defence of the rationality of religious belief, any appeal to the significance of encountering God for the subject. According to Flew it is wrong, if evidence will not decide the issue, to conclude that both options are equally viable.

Nor is this a case, as seems sometimes to be thought, where in the absence of decisive proof or disproof the reasonable man must allow the option to be wide open: six on one side and half a dozen on the other; you cannot prove it and I cannot disprove it. So you can as reasonably choose to believe as we to disbelieve. Even if there were such a perfect balance of evidence and that were the whole story, the moral would be: not that belief and disbelief equally are both reasonable; but that the rational man must suspend judgement.⁵⁰

Here we see Flew adopting the position of W.K. Clifford that belief ought to be proportioned exactly to evidence so that if there is, per impossible, an exact balance of evidence one must suspend judgement on the issue. William James writes of the demand that a person wait until there is sufficient evidence that it is, "*the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave.*"⁵¹ It is queer first of all because we are not just thinking machines. We have desires and needs and wishes and cannot suspend judgement on all issues until we have sufficient evidence to warrant belief. Secondly it is queer because, as James pointed out, the "hypothesis" that there is a God may be the kind of "hypothesis" that has to be met half way. Whilst rejecting the language of hypothesis, the evidentialist challenge is fundamentally misconceived since it excludes any appeal to the way in which God's reality is given in the life of the believer. Taking the point that the option cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, we can say that the evidentialist position is, itself, irrational on the grounds that, " ... a rule of

⁵⁰Flew. *God and Philosophy*. P.194.

⁵¹James. *The Will To Believe*. P.30.

thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule."⁵²

I am, therefore, agreeing with James that one can believe in accordance with one's passional nature and saying that, in fact, this is the only way in which God's reality can be given and that to bring a person to see that there is a God one must carry out a set of procedures to change their way of looking at things. One might say that one has to motivate them to believe.⁵³ In the context of discussing the fact that we are not simply reasoning machines, Flew writes,

A reason for believing, like a reason, for doing anything else, may be a motive. In this totally different sense of *reason* to offer a reason is not at all to present evidence for the truth of what might be believed, for the propositional content of that belief. Rather it is to suggest a motive for acquiring or preserving those various dispositions to action and all the rest of it which the belief, as a psychological phenomenon, is constituted.⁵⁴

Flew is referring to what he conceives to be the non-epistemic sense of a reason why a person believes in God.⁵⁵ An example of a reason why a person believes in God would be, for example, that they find life to be meaningless and this is a motivation for their coming to believe in God. It is something that makes a person believe in God but it has no bearing on the question whether or not God exists. According to Flew, "*an apologist should be most embarrassed to stand revealed as pressing reasons of this sort*".⁵⁶ If reasons as motives are offered, then, according to Flew, the question of the truth of Christian beliefs has been lost. On the contrary, by the end of the thesis it will be clear that it is only by being offered reasons in this sense, reasons as motives, that the truth of Christian beliefs can be found. That is, it is only through being brought to see that there is a God, that God's reality can be given. For Anthony Flew, however,

⁵²James. *The Will To Believe*. P.28.

⁵³James and Caroline Franks Davis would agree on the necessity of coming to see that there is a God. See Franks Davis. "*The Devotional Experiment*." P.22. James. *The Will To Believe*. P.25.

⁵⁴Flew. *God and Philosophy*. P.181.

⁵⁵On the various kinds of reason see Audi, Robert. *The Structure of Justification*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1993. P.100. On forms of justification other than epistemic see Alston, William P. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. P.113.

⁵⁶Flew. *God and Philosophy*.. P.182.

there is only one way to arrive at the truth. One must be offered reasons in the logical sense from which one can infer that God exists. In the next section I will argue that Flew is tacitly assuming infallibilism concerning our epistemic principles. I will reject this position and, using a distinction between normative and evaluative justification, suggest that believers are, given the nature of belief in God, justified or reasonable in believing in God and that given the nature of belief in God, one must take steps to come to see that there is a God.

2.4 Normative and Evaluative Justification

At one point, Flew seems to acknowledge the point of Alston and James that in certain situations one must act or choose to believe. In this context Flew writes that if this is the case, if one is forced to act or forced to hold a belief, then one should acknowledge that one does not know that the belief in question is true and, *mutatis mutandis*, one can not justifiably claim to believe in God. He does not, however, seem to preclude the possibility of “deciding” to believe. His point is that this state of affairs is an unfortunate one and that one ought to recognise that one can not justifiably claim knowledge or warranted belief.⁵⁷ Believers can, I will argue, claim to know that there is a God.

In chapter one I wrote that the notion that evidence is truth conducive is based on a presupposition, not defended, that the most appropriate way to arrive at the truth is to look for propositional evidence to support one’s beliefs. I wrote that this is something that we learn. It is not self evident, not a truth so obvious that understanding it is sufficient to see that it is true, that having evidence, in Flew’s sense of evidence, for the truth of one’s beliefs is the only or even the most appropriate means of ensuring that one’s beliefs are true. If asked to defend the presupposition, the evidentialist would, I am arguing, have to appeal to experience. We can see from the way in which we do go about things that having evidence is, on many occasions, a good way to arrive at the truth.⁵⁸ However, unless one presupposes that the principle that evidence is truth

⁵⁷Flew. *God and Philosophy*. Pp.183-184.

⁵⁸The alternative, that we can just “see” that we should believe only where the evidence justifies the belief, is articulated in terms of a normative deontological concept of justification. For the normative deontological concept of epistemic justification see above. Alvin Plantinga argues that if it is self evident that we have a duty to believe only if there is sufficient evidence to justify the belief, then content can be given to

conducive is an infallible epistemic principle, one can maintain that truth comes in different forms.

I will articulate this point concerning epistemic principles by considering a distinction between normative and evaluative justification, showing that there can be different standards for being justified and different conceptions concerning whether these standards are truth conducive.⁵⁹ In chapter one I noted the connection that Flew made between being rational, being justified and having evidence.⁶⁰ There are two aspects to the notion of being justified. First, that to be justified in believing is for that belief to be up to standard; this is the normative component to justification. The standard for Flew is that of having evidence. The other aspect is the evaluative aspect. That is, that one is doing well as far as holding true beliefs is concerned. With this distinction in mind, we can now consider beliefs in different communities.

Members of a primitive tribe are obliged to accept a proposition if the elders of the tribe assert that it is true. In this case the tribal member is normatively justified, Jn, if the elders assert that a proposition is true and if they believe it on this basis. This is what we might refer to as testimonial evidence. It is not going to be propositional evidence. It could be propositional evidence. For example, the member of the tribe could reason he has been told something by the elders of the tribe, that most of the time what the elders of the tribe tell him is true, so that in this case what the elders of the tribe have told him is probably true. However, let us say that the member of the tribe just finds himself believing the proposition in question.

In this case we can say that the member of the tribe is forming and maintaining beliefs as he ought to where the sense of ought is "in accordance with the norms of that particular society." However this may not be a reliable method for attaining truth and, therefore, the tribal member would not be justified evaluatively, Je, in accepting this

the irrationality of believing on insufficient evidence. One has gone against a deliverance of reason. If, however, this is not self evident, then irrationality must be understood as a label for a certain form of behaviour. Plantinga. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. P.136. For a good argument for divorcing the concept of rationality from that of justification see Audi, Robert. "Faith, Belief and Rationality," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991):220-222.

⁵⁹Alston, William P. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. Pp.115-116.

⁶⁰Plantinga notes the pervasive connection between being justified and having evidence such that the two are often considered as synonymous. Plantinga. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. P.26.

proposition where to be judged to be justified evaluatively is to be judged to be doing well from an epistemic point of view, or from the point of view of wanting to hold true rather than false beliefs.⁶¹ From the perspective of rational western twentieth century humans the conditions for arriving at the truth in a primitive tribe will not be conditions that are evaluated positively from this perspective. Therefore, one can conceive of a situation in which a belief may be Jn but not Je justified. The subject who believes that p would not however, know this. This is a judgement made from the outside concerning the circumstance in which the belief is formed.

Therefore, one can conceive of a situation in which a belief may be Jn but not Je justified. In the case of the tribal member, the subject who believes that p would not know this. This is a judgement made from the outside about the standards for arriving at the truth. This does not necessarily mean that tribal members had a different aim in mind. For example, it is not necessarily the case that they were concerned with moral or prudential justification.⁶² It does mean that from the perspective of a different community, whilst the members of the tribe are, in terms of the standards of that tribe, believing as they ought to, they are not doing very well from an epistemic point of view. There are limitations to any example. This one presupposes a standard of evaluative justification, and members of a primitive tribe may have no conception of the aim of wanting to hold true rather than false beliefs. However, the example does illustrate the distinction that I wish to make between believing as one ought to or in accordance with the norms for a particular community and doing well as far as holding true rather than false beliefs is concerned.

It is not difficult to think of an analogous case for Western society. Let us say that a fundamentalist Christian takes as the standard for authority, the Bible. Whenever a scientific belief conflicts with the Bible the fundamentalist believes the Bible. From the perspective of the scientist, the fundamentalist Christian will be normatively justified because she is believing as she ought to or in accordance with the standard or with one of the standards of that community. However, clearly from the perspective of the

⁶¹Alston, W.P. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. P.115.

⁶²Alston, William P. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. P.113.

scientist she will not be evaluatively justified since this is not, from the scientific perspective a reliable way of getting at the truth.⁶³

Is it also possible to be evaluatively justified but not normatively justified? Alston argues that a procedure may be reliable although one has strong but spurious reasons for regarding it as unreliable. One would then be Je justified but not Jn justified because by engaging in the practice one is going against one's intellectual duty not to believe if there is evidence against the belief. Suppose that one is presented with convincing though false evidence that one's sensory experience is artificially produced in a laboratory. To be justified normatively one must take this false evidence into account. If one fails to do this one has not fulfilled an intellectual obligation. Therefore, taking the evidence into account, one must conclude that one cannot determine whether one's perceptual experience is produced in normal manner. Therefore, one has strong reasons for supposing that one's perceptual belief forming processes are unreliable, that is that they are not producing true beliefs. However, they are as reliable as those of a normal person.⁶⁴ There is an initial problem with this. Unless one can give content to the notion that there are strong reasons to believe this, it would seem that one would continue to be Jn. That is, one would only be violating an intellectual duty or not believing as one ought to if one ignored reasons for regarding a procedure as unreliable and this is exactly what has not been shown.

Therefore, we can accept the claim that one can be Jn but not Je justified because there is a concrete example of this situation. It is a judgement that could be made from the perspective of a rational twentieth century person judging the beliefs of a primitive tribe or from the perspective of a scientist judging a fundamentalist Christian. However, the notion that one might be Je justified but not Jn justified has not been demonstrated because no content was given to the claim that there could be good reasons for supposing that one's sensory experiences are artificially produced. The question is simply begged.

This does not mean that one cannot be in a position of being Je but not Jn justified. It means that Alston's example was not a very felicitous one. What we need is an example of a practice of forming beliefs that may be reliable although we have no

⁶³See Alston. *Perceiving God*. P.239.

⁶⁴Alston. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief." Pp.115-116.

reason to suppose that it is reliable or reason to suppose that it is not reliable. I think that we could give content to this idea in terms of revolutions in science⁶⁵ That is, one may come up with a new scientific theory but it conflicts with all of the accepted theories and introduces a new standard of assessment. This would be a case of being Je justified but not Jn justified. If the fundamental obligation is not to believe things without having evidence, then the scientist may break this rule in order to develop a theory that cannot be currently reconciled with what is known in that area of science. If that theory is accepted then it will be seen that the scientist was Je but not Jn justified. This idea would accord with the way in which Kuhn conceives of "progress" in science. In this case a scientist may come to recognise an anomaly, a fact that cannot be explained by current scientific theory. If the anomaly persists, then, the scientist may be forced to construct a new theory to account for the anomalous fact. At the time that the theory is constructed, a fact which will involve the scientist in adhering to new rules, there may be much opposition from those who adhere to the old theory with its set of rules. Eventually though, and for reasons too complex to go into here, the new theory will be accepted and the scientific community will proceed using these new rules.⁶⁶ Therefore we have the notions of being Jn and being Je justified and we have seen that these two ideas can in principle be kept separate. However, it is maintained that there must be a reason why we value justification and this reason has to do with the fact that the standards or criteria for normative justification, if appropriately chosen, are conducive to arriving at the truth.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Wolterstorff denies this claiming that there is no purely evaluative concept of justification. Wolterstorff, Nicholas. "Can Belief in God be Rational if It Has No Foundations?" In Plantinga and Wolterstorff.. *Faith and Rationality*. Footnote 12. Pp.183-184.

⁶⁶Kuhn, T.S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1973. Pp.58-59.

⁶⁷Alston argues that justification should not be conceived of in terms of a duty or obligation to conform to certain standards. One could do one's duty and yet fail to arrive at the truth. This would be the case for the members of the primitive tribe. From this conclusion, however, he moves to the claim that we have a purely evaluative concept of justification. This is what he calls a narrow evaluative sense of justification in contrast to the deontological concept. His evaluative notion is that the belief must be based on adequate grounds, a position, argues Plantinga, that is simply an extension of the notion of a belief being based upon evidence. However, he conflates the normative and deontological components of justification. One might have a notion of normative justification without it being deontological, that is without it being conceived of in terms of a duty, moral or otherwise. He is right that a notion in terms of being up to standard will not suffice since one may have beliefs that are up to standard but from an evaluative point of view, one may not be doing well. Alston. *Epistemic Justification*. Pp.95 and 97.

Returning to the members of the tribe, we can see that a purely normative concept of justification is inadequate because it does not connect with the notion of truth conducive grounds. The members of the tribe could be normatively justified, in the sense that their beliefs are up to the standard set by their community, but not evaluatively justified in a narrow sense of being justified from the point of view of getting at the truth. There is still a sense in which we would talk of a belief being up to standard but it would have to incorporate an evaluative element. That is, whilst agreeing that the beliefs in question are up to the standards of the tribe, from our own perspective, believing in accord with these standards does not seem to be a good way to arrive at the truth. We have different standards which we believe are truth conducive. When we refer to a belief being based on adequate grounds, there is a normative component to this idea. There is still a question of the appropriate standard.⁶⁸

We now know what is meant by normative and evaluative justification. God's reality is, I have been arguing, given in encountering God. Why should truth not be given through encountering God and in terms of standards normally taken to be other than epistemic?⁶⁹ The fundamental question whether or not there is a God can only be answered in terms of participating in that form of life. To come to know that there is a God is to come to have faith in God. Thus, believers have their own standard for being justified. Normatively and evaluatively, this has to do with faith. Sibley said that aesthetic judgements could only be justified by a perceptual proof, by bringing a subject to see that a work of art has a particular quality. Transposing this point, the reality of God, God's existence can only be known through faith. One has to come to see that there is a God. One must provide motives for believing, persuade people to believe. Flew would undoubtedly reject this. I have already written that Kvanvig argues that epistemic principles are not infallible. By an epistemic principle he means a principle of the form, "*if state of affairs e were to obtain, then p would be shown to be true.*" Such principles are, he writes, context relative.⁷⁰ In terms of the evidentialist challenge to

⁶⁸Plantinga reads Alston's idea on justification as, amongst other things, a broadening or extension of the tradition of having evidence. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. P.190.

⁶⁹On other types of Justification see Alston, William P. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff. *Faith and Rationality*. P.113.

⁷⁰Kvanvig, Jonathon L. "Credulity," *International Journal For Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984):109.

religious belief, one can allow that in other contexts having evidence or basing one's belief on the available evidence is truth conducive. In the case of belief in God, however, the state of affairs that obtains must be that of seeing that there is a God. In this context, the context of religious belief, and from the point of view of wishing to know that there is a God, one must come to see that there is a God.

We end up, therefore, in the position of having standards that are relative to a particular community of believers, standards that are pragmatically justified.⁷¹ One might say that in the case of believing in God coming to see that there is a God is the best available means to that end, where the best available means is the one with the best chance of success.⁷² We have to add the caveat that it must be a rationally acceptable end and say that the end is rationally acceptable if it does not conflict with any other more valued goal. As set out by Michael Scriven, the assumption is that the most appropriate means to the end of knowledge is that of acquiring sufficient evidence in the form of other beliefs that one holds. One might say that the goal is to know whether or not there is a God. The most efficient means is to take certain steps. Does this conflict with other more valuable goals? It does not conflict with the goal of behaving morally or being credulous or wanting, if possible to have evidence. We now see how, on one definition of rationality, it would be rational to be irrational in terms of another definition. That is, evidentialists connect rationality with justification and with sufficient evidence such that belief on insufficient evidence is irrational. But on means-end rationality believing on insufficient evidence and in accordance with one's passional nature might be the most rational way to believe because it brings about the desired end of wanting to know whether or not God exists.

Scriven might argue that a process must be identified as the most efficient means to that end so that we must have evidence that it is the most efficient means to that end. If, for example, a procedure is identified as producing knowledge then that procedure is identified as the most efficient means of acquiring knowledge.⁷³ How does

⁷¹On the pragmatic justification of epistemic standards see Runzo, Joseph. *Reason Relativism and God*. Pp.38-48. For a variety of reason Bartley sees the type of argument as leading to unfortunate consequences. See Bartley, W.W. *The Retreat To Commitment*. London: Chatto and Windus. 1964. Chapter 4.

⁷²Scriven. *Primary Philosophy*. P.15.

⁷³Scriven. *Primary Philosophy*. P.21.

he know that having evidence is the best means to the end of acquiring knowledge? The answer comes that we must appeal to the past record of success of that particular means to that particular end. He now takes up the position of Flew that the most rational belief is the belief held on evidence and having evidence is also the most rational means to this end. So we have the claim that means end rationality shows that basing belief on evidence gives best chance of being right. What we see is the assumption that evidence is the most rational means and then the different concept of rationality as justified belief.⁷⁴ This may be so in other areas of life but in the case of wanting to know whether or not God exists, the most appropriate means to that end is taking certain practical steps to see that God exists. Mackie says that,

... we shall be intellectually better placed in relation to theism-whether in the end we accept it or reject it-if we have at least once made the experiment of playing along with it, if we have genuinely opened not only the intellectual but also the passional of our minds to the possibility of conversing with "the gods" ...⁷⁵

If we adopt the Scriven principle that we should look at the past record of success of a means to an end, then we would find that experiencing God is the best means to the end of coming to know whether or not God exists.

The mistake of confusing the contexts of epistemic justification can be shown in the anachronistic position of a number of philosophers who have argued that to believe on insufficient evidence is a "sin," that there is something morally wrong in holding a belief without sufficient evidence to justify the belief in question.⁷⁶ W.K. Clifford says

⁷⁴Scriven. *Primary Philosophy*. Footnote 5, P.16.

⁷⁵Mackie, J.L. *The Miracle of Theism. Arguments for and Against The Existence of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1982. P.209.

⁷⁶Although their position seems anachronistic the mistake of judging belief in God according to standards that are alien to it remains firmly in place. This point is developed in the following chapters. I argued above that we should reject the concept of deontological justification on the grounds that it presupposes a capacity given us by God. This notion of having a moral obligation also makes use of the idea that we can see that it is a sin to believe on insufficient evidence and should be rejected for the same reason. The notion of it being a sin is not required. Sin does not have to come into it all. Using the idea of means end rationality one can argue simply that there would be something wrong with believing in God in participating in the Christian way of life if so participating lead to immoral consequences. See Plantinga, Alvin. *Reason and Belief in God*. Pp.31-32 for the different ways in which one may conceive of the duty involved. Finally, the question of control over beliefs is related to the notion of a duty to believe only when the evidence justifies the belief. It is argued that one can only be held responsible for one's beliefs if one's beliefs are under one's control. If it is the case that we can indirectly control our beliefs then, deontologists claim, we can be held responsible for the beliefs that we have. See above on belief control. On normative deontological justification see Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Ch.1. Specifically on

that “*It is wrong always, everywhere and for everyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.*”⁷⁷ Likewise, Brand Blanshard writes that, “... *everywhere and always belief has an ethical aspect.*” Belief should be proportioned to evidence.⁷⁸ Michael Scriven writes that believing without evidence is a “sin” and “plainly irrational”.⁷⁹ The first part of this argument, which I will not concern myself with, is that since beliefs may lead to evil consequences, we have a moral duty to ensure that we believe only if there is sufficient evidence to justify the belief.⁸⁰ It is the second aspect of the argument that is of immediate concern. Realising that not all beliefs lead to evil consequences, Clifford supplements his first argument with the claim that believing on insufficient evidence is a sin because it leads to credulity and credulity in a great number of people will result in a credulous society.⁸¹ The result will be that knowledge does not advance as it should.

Clifford, Blanshard and those who agree with them, are making comparisons between different views. They are importing an alien standard of rationality into belief in God and judging it according to this standard. As I will show, in chapters three and four in particular, this is still a current practice. Belief in God does not have to do with making advances in society; it does not have to do with adding to our stock of knowledge but with finding answers to those fundamental existential questions that continue to bother us. There is no necessary connection between beliefs held in one sphere of one’s life, say religious beliefs and the way in which one holds beliefs in another, say in one’s career as a scientist. One may, for example, trust that God exists

Scriven and Clifford see Plantinga. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. P.26.

⁷⁷Quoted in Sessions, William Lad. “*Religious Faith and Rational Justification*,” *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982):147.

⁷⁸On this whole are of moral responsibility and related issues see Blanshard, Brand. *Reason and Belief*. Ch.10. Quotation P.401.

⁷⁹Scriven. *Primary Philosophy*. P.103.

⁸⁰In Blanshard, the claim that there is an ethical aspect to believing, that there is something morally wrong with missing the truth through either ignorance or error, seems, at one point, to be based on the assumption that knowledge is intrinsically good. However, he develops the argument in terms of the evil consequences of holding such a belief. See Blanshard. *Reason and Belief*. P.401.

⁸¹On Clifford and credulity see Rowe, William. *Philosophy of Religion. An Introduction*. California, Dickenson Publishing Co. 1978. Pp.172-176. For the credulity argument see also Scriven, Michael. *Primary Philosophy*. New York and London: McGraw Hill Book Company. 1966. Pp.148-151. On Clifford in general see Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. P.30.

and believe the proposition that God exists on what would, for Clifford, be insufficient evidence but why should this fact entail that one is “credulous” in the matter of other beliefs? If by credulous we mean believing on faith, then a person can in their religious life believe on faith and, in other areas of their life, believe on the basis of evidence.

2.5 A Place For Argument?

I wrote in the introduction that, *prima facie*, there seem to be two reasons for maintaining that argument remains important in the context of the Christian way of looking at things. The first is that believers themselves give up their beliefs because they are presented with an argument against the existence of God.⁸² The second is that the notion of a picture of the world would itself seem to call for an understanding of the place of argument and evidence. Our pictures change and an explanation of this change is that argument and evidence bring about the changes in our pictures of the world. I also wrote that this places a strain on the idea of God’s reality being given in a picture of the world. The strain comes in the attempt to reconcile the claim that belief in God is non-cognitive, in the sense that God is not an object like other objects, and subject to empirical investigation in the way in which one might enquire into the existence of more mundane objects, with the claim that argument does have something to do with belief in God. In this section I will attempt to provide a solution to this problem by considering various ways in which one might conceive of the place of argument and evidence within a way of looking at the world.

I believe that a solution to the problem of the relation between “evidence” and belief in God can be found through employing one of Tracy’s insights concerning religious experience. He refers to its *sui generis* character by which term he has in mind that the initial experience of “encountering” God is a fundamental event of a realised truth. He also has in mind that this event is so significant, that it changes the way that one looks at things. Once one has come to see in a different way; these other possibilities, these alternative explanations, are real possibilities for a person who believes in God, but they are not possibilities that introduce a constant source of doubt.

⁸²Nielsen, Kai. “Groundlessness and Religious Believing.” In Runzo, J and Ihara, C.K. *Religious Experience and Religious Belief. Essays in the Epistemology of Religion*. USA: University Press of America. 1986. P.25. He writes that questions about the existence of God, unlike questions about the reality of the external world, have actual practical import. They make a difference in the lives of believers.

The fundamental nature of the initial experience precludes the possibility of this constant source of doubt.⁸³

There are reasons to prefer Tracy's conception of what it is to know that there is a God and his conception of the relation between belief in God and competing explanations for belief in God. To take the first point, Phillips criticises Alvin Plantinga's position on the rationality of religious belief on the grounds that Plantinga's position leaves God's reality entirely unmediated. Phillips's position actually leads to the same problem. Although, he conceives of God's reality as given in the lives of believers in all that they do and say, there is an absence in his work, of any explanation of why believers do so believe.⁸⁴ Since this is considered in more detail in the next chapter, I will not expand upon it here. It will suffice to say that if Phillips had included a "description" of the ways in which people come to believe and of what God means to them, then he would have had the grounds for an explanation of the relation between alternative explanations and religious belief. As it is, he does not. He conceives of asking questions about whether or not there is a God as a process of moving into a different way of looking at things.⁸⁵ These are normal questions within a way of looking at things, within the believers perspective.

I will start by making clear Phillips's position. The evidentialist challenge included the notion that assent ought to be proportioned to evidence. If, per impossible, there were, on balance, slightly more evidence for than against the existence of God, then one would be justified in believing in God but one's belief in God would have to be tentative. If there were a lot more evidence for than against the existence of God, then one's belief in God could be held more strongly. The problem with this is, according to Phillips, that it distorts the nature of belief in God. Fundamentally, the subject of the evidentialist investigation does not seem to be the subject of religious worship. According to Phillips, since coming to believe in God is not a matter of estimating the probability that God exists and since believing in God is not a matter of continually

⁸³Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination. Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Cross Road. 1991. Pp.170-178.

⁸⁴The claim that to ask whether there is a God is to wonder about praise and praying hardly seems sufficient to account for coming to believe in God. Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.181.

⁸⁵Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.168.

estimating whether there is sufficient evidence to justify the belief in God, there is no correspondence between the subject of philosophical investigation and the God of scripture.⁸⁶ The position of Phillips seems to be analogous to that of David Miller for whom, "*Questions of truth and falsity remain irrelevant ... in true faith.*"⁸⁷

There are numerous examples to support Phillips's notion that believing in God is not a matter of entertaining a hypothesis that is contingent upon the evidence available. The exemplars of faith did not ask for evidence that God exists. According to Scripture Abraham did not, after hearing God's voice say that he would just try to verify that it was really God speaking to him. He did not, for instance, stop to reflect upon whether he had ingested any hallucinatory drugs in the last three or four hours. He did not scour the area to see whether one of his friends was playing a trick on him. Nor did he consider the possibility of sun stroke. Abraham just went.⁸⁸ In the story of Moses and the burning bush we do not read that Moses looked for evidence. He did not check to see whether there was some natural explanation for the burning bush and he did not question his own sanity.⁸⁹ King Ahaz was threatened by destruction by the Assyrians and was told to believe otherwise he would not be established. In the Gospels Thomas asks for evidence that it is Jesus and is rebuked. There are various passages from the gospels in which people respond in faith; Jesus heals them and casts out demons. There is an emphasis on childlike trust. In the Pauline letters the wisdom of this world is rejected. It is only by faith that we are justified.⁹⁰ Having given similar examples Phillips says that,

... it is patently obvious that belief in God is not a matter of believers entertaining a hypothesis. It is not a matter of embracing the best available explanation given the evidence at hand.⁹¹

⁸⁶Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.9. Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.181.

⁸⁷Miller, David L. *Gods and Games. Toward a Theology of Play*. New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Company. 1970. P.168. Miller's work includes the notion that to believe in God is to be "gripped" by a certain picture.

⁸⁸Bouwsma. *Without Proof or Evidence*. Pp.8-14.

⁸⁹Bouswma. *Without Proof Or Evidence*. P.11.

⁹⁰Blanshard. *Reason and Belief*. Pp.412-414.

⁹¹Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.9. See also Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. Pp.180-181.

If belief in God were contingent upon evidence, then, assuming that commitment is in turn contingent upon the truth of the beliefs in question, if the truth of the beliefs is brought into question, the commitment must weaken.⁹²

The first problem with this is that it is not true that the exemplars of the faith do not question whether a particular experience is an experience of God. Since this issue is discussed in a later chapter, I will not go into details here.⁹³ The second thing is that Phillips has used examples of particular experiences which is incommensurate with this idea that believing in God is to do with having an entire picture of the world. We need the notion of questioning this total way of seeing things and when we get this notion we find that there seems to be something wrong with the idea that believers believe in God totally, respond to God always, and never wonder whether they might not be mistaken in their beliefs. Kai Nielsen writes,

"God is unreal. God is but a figment of our imaginations borne of our deepest needs" are not deviant English sentences ... At least some believers understand such talk, and there are many ex-believers and doubting Thomases and people struggling in various ways with religious belief. In their struggles and in their expectable and understandable wrestlings with faith, such talk has a home. Questions about whether God is really a figment of our imagination quite naturally arise. Moreover, their typical contexts are not bizarre and metaphysical contexts in which we ask whether physical objects are real or whether memory beliefs are ever reliable. In our lives, that is, they are, for believer and non-believer alike, not idling questions like "Is time real?".⁹⁴

Therefore, whilst the exemplars of the faith may not have questioned, believers are not all exemplars of the faith and evidence would seem to have something to do with their beliefs. Believers do wrestle with evidence that seems to undermine their belief in God. In their questioning they are not wondering whether on a particular occasion they might be mistaken concerning whether an experience that seems to them to be an experience

⁹²Trigg, Roger. *Reason and Commitment*. Pp.44-47.

⁹³See for example Alston, William P. *Perceiving God*. P.201. He discusses the criteria according to which St. Theresa of Avila distinguished a genuine presence of God from an apparent presence produced by her own endeavours. Phillips might reply that this is a case of distinguishing within the faith between a veridical and non-veridical experience. It is not a case of wondering whether or not there is a God. The next point that I make overcomes this potential reply.

⁹⁴Nielsen, Kai. "Religion and Groundless Believing." In Runzo, J and Ihara, C.K. *Religious Experience and Religious Belief. Essays in the Epistemology of Religion*. USA: University Press of America. 1986. Pp.24-25.

of God might be delusory. The sort of questioning that Nielsen is talking about is fundamental questioning concerning whether there really is a God. The intellect does seem to place demands upon us and one of these demands is that we take account of argument and evidence. If faced with the challenge of the apparently conflicting truth claims of the world's religions, we would call a believer irrational if that believer refused to address the issue.⁹⁵

It would seem, therefore, that believers do take account of evidence. Phillips raises the question of the possibility of a sensible evidentialism but says that "*any application of a sensible evidentialism to the existence of God is strained in the extreme.*"⁹⁶ The reason that it is strained is, clearly enough, that everything that I have said so far in this thesis has pointed towards belief in God being given in a way of looking at things and against the notion that belief in God has to do with having sufficient reason to justify the belief that God exists. Although introducing the question of the relation between evidence and a way of looking at things or a picture of the world places a strain upon the idea of belief in God defended in terms of the latter, since it is the case that believers are exercised by the questions that arise in argument and evidence we have to try to find a place for them. The alternative is to deny that argument and evidence have anything to do with belief in God.

Phillips conceives of the answer to this question in terms of a believer being beset by doubts from within another way of thinking.⁹⁷ Fundamentally, since God's reality is given in a way of looking at things, it is not given on the basis of evidence but in participating in this way of life. It is, according to Phillips, given absolutely and to ask whether one might be mistaken in toto about one's belief in God is to think in the wrong way or to move towards a different picture. To lose faith is not to give up belief in an object.⁹⁸ There is something wrong with this; believers do consider whether their belief

⁹⁵This point is made by William Lad Sessions. See Sessions, William Lad. "*Religious Faith and Rational Justification*," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982):151-153. Sessions refers to the demands of the intellect. The use of the word "demand" is redolent of the normative deontological concept of justification discussed above. Sessions needs to elucidate upon the demands of the intellect making it clear how he conceives of these demands. Can we, for example, just see that the intellect demands that our beliefs be justified? If we can just see this, is this because we have learned this fact?

⁹⁶Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.80.

⁹⁷Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.83.

⁹⁸Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P. 181.

as a whole might be mistaken but not in such a manner that it undermines their faith or makes their faith tentative and the an explanation for this is that given by David Tracy. It is the initial experience of a realised truth that remains fundamental whilst one considers alternative explanations for the Christian picture as a whole.⁹⁹ In chapter one I made reference to the sorts of truths that are disclosed in works of art and other classic expressions of lived experience and suggested that these are not the sorts of truths that can be determined to be either true or false in the course of an argument. Rather, they are the sorts of truths that are known in the way that one lives and considered over a length of time in terms of all that one knows and may come to know. This process does not make faith contingent upon evidence; it does not rise or fall with every new thing that one discovers. Faith is maintained by the initial experience.

Phillips' own position calls for a sensible evidentialism. Certainly we can agree with him that alternative beliefs that necessarily preclude the possibility of believing in God, can not be alternatives within the same mode of discourse.¹⁰⁰ However, as Phillips recognises, our pictures of the world change. What was once a basic proposition may become a belief or a part of a theory. Some pictures disappear altogether and some pictures whilst being called the same seem so far distanced from other pictures referred to by the same name that we wonder whether they are the same or even similar in any important respects. When Phillips talks about changes in our pictures, he makes change into something esoteric, something that just happens but we know not how.¹⁰¹ In the case of religion, can we not say that the reason for the changes in the picture, changes in which framework propositions do come to be questioned and in which new framework propositions are put into place, has to do with, to some degree, argument and evidence? The reason that it is difficult to say just exactly how this occurs is the time period under consideration. However, when other beliefs become established that conflict with beliefs of the Christian picture, the beliefs of the Christian picture become problematical. If enough of the beliefs are problematic for a certain theologian in any case, then the basic propositions change.

⁹⁹Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. Pp.172-175.

¹⁰⁰Phillips. *Religion Without Explanation*. P.168.

¹⁰¹Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. Pp.62-64.

Would this not be an adequate account of John Hick's Christian position? His fundamental proposition is no longer that there is an almighty omniscient omnipotent and all good creator God but a noumenal principle behind all phenomenal representations. Certainly in the case of Hick we would want to say that the change was brought about by reflecting on other beliefs that he holds as well as by practical experience and this is the sort of thing that we would normally call evidence. The evidence forced him to reflect and in reflecting he changed his view of things and if enough people follow then there may be a fundamental shift from one way of looking at things to another. Does this not give content to the way in which our pictures shift? Evidence has something to do with it.

It is a sensible evidentialism that allows belief in God to remain live. If there is one point that may be taken from the great diversity of opinion it is this; that the question whether or not God exists is, in intellectual terms, still an open one. James says of a hypothesis that, "... *if the total drift of thinking continues to confirm it, that is what he means by its being true.*"¹⁰² In this case, recourse to the academic world would at least allow a person to say that the hypothesis that God exists is still an option in the sense that there is no decisive evidence either way. Could we not say, therefore, that the very fact that the issue has not been decided on intellectual grounds, a fact which we are all aware of, entails that the believer can be justified in believing in God? Believers themselves do not in fact need to do anything at all in terms of argument and evidence. They do not even need to refer to philosophers and theologians since it just is the case that the picture that is the Christian way of looking at things is live in this culture at this time.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that it is encountering God that is most significant in "establishing" that there is a God and that the evidentialist challenge is misconceived. It precludes any appeal to the way in which God's reality actually is given in the life of the believer. I have also written that argument and evidence remain important but within the context, in the case of a serious enquirer, of a fundamental concern and, in the life of the believer, within the context of having encountered God. In the next two chapters,

¹⁰²James. *The Will To Believe*. P.17.

I consider a reply to the evidentialist objection that fails to accord any place to the way in which God's reality is given in the life of the believer and show the consequences of this failure.

CHAPTER THREE

Basic Belief in God

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I critically discuss, with reference to the work of John Hick, Alvin Plantinga's defence of the rationality of religious belief. The fundamental problem with Plantinga's position and the position of the "tradition" of which he is a part is that it involves the attempt to justify belief in God by appealing to religious experience as the grounds for justification. Rather than arguing in terms of what the belief means to the believer and then trying to defend the rationality of belief in God in terms that are appropriate to the nature of belief in God, Plantinga, in particular, takes religious experience to be, not a significant encounter with God, but just something to appeal to in detailing the conditions in which belief in God is justified. There is no sense in Plantinga of the religious dimension of experience. W.W. Bartley notes that the fundamental questions of modern philosophy are questions such as "How do you know?" and "How do you justify your beliefs?" and "With what do you guarantee your opinions?" The result, he writes, is always an authoritarian answer with the subsequent result that those who offer their justification then spend their time "*in getting these supposedly infallible epistemological authorities out of trouble.*"¹ The tradition of which Plantinga is a part has given up an appeal to an infallible authority, or an infallible standard according to which their beliefs are justified, but it remains, nonetheless, an attempt to justify their beliefs and the result is, as we will see, that they must defend the standard that they have chosen.

Bartley suggests that since the history of the attempt to find a standard according to which one's beliefs are justified manifests a lack of success, the question that is asked ought to be changed. For a philosopher who acknowledged that we have no criteria according to which we can guarantee the truth of our beliefs, a different question would become important. This question would acknowledge or presuppose that we can not justify our beliefs in any sense that would guarantee their truth, and ask how we can expose our beliefs to maximum criticism so that we avoid as much intellectual error as

¹Bartley, W.W. *The Retreat to Commitment*. London: Chatto and Windus. 1964. P.135.

possible.² The, first three critical activities are most apposite for empirical and scientific beliefs: the check of logic; the check of sense observation; and the check of scientific theory. The final criticism, the check of the problem, or consideration concerning what the theory is intended to solve and whether it does it successfully, has wider applicability. By this I mean that in terms of religious belief, reflection, in terms of the final check, should show that the first three criteria are not appropriate for belief in God. If we take the fourth criterion, and consider the nature of belief in God, we might develop criteria according to which belief in God may be judged.³ This point will be developed in the final chapter. Before making the claim that we should ask a different question of religious belief, we need to know why looking for criteria according to which the belief may be justified does not work.⁴

The attempt to justify belief in God by finding a standard in accordance with which belief in God is epistemically justified ensures that apologists become embroiled in debate about whether they really know that there is a God, whether belief in God is justified according to that standard. In the case of Plantinga, the chosen standard is not meant to guarantee the truth of the belief but it is meant to be truth conducive. The result is the same. Critics will argue that this is not an appropriate criterion. The result is continued argument over whether believers really know or can justifiably believe that there is a God. In the case of Plantinga we will see that the inevitable outcome of his initial position is an argument defending the original standard that he chose.

3.2 John Hick's Defence of the Rationality of Religious Belief

Hick places his own contribution to the defence of the rationality of religious belief within a "tradition" of defending the rationality of religious belief along similar lines. In an article from 1967 Hick writes that a person can be rational in believing in God on the basis of a compelling religious experience and he writes of this kind of defence of the rationality of religious belief that, "*Although this kind of approach has yet to be fully*

²Bartley. *The Retreat To Commitment*. P.140.

³I do not mean to suggest that religious belief should be considered as a theory that solves a problem.

⁴See for example Rorty on recognising the problems with a previous form of discourse before attempting to do something different. Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1990. P.366.

worked out and formally presented, it is being widely canvassed in discussions and represents one of the growing edges of philosophical theology today.”⁵ In “*An Interpretation of Religion*,” Hick defends the rationality of religious belief, arguing that a person who reports a compelling awareness of living in the presence of God can, with appropriate caveats, be rational in believing in God and writes that others have “argued along analogous lines.” He includes, amongst these others, C.D. Broad, writing in 1939; Plantinga in his work “*God and Other Minds*” first published in 1967; Swinburne writing in “*The Existence of God*” in 1979; and his own work, “*Faith and Knowledge*,” first published in 1957.⁶ Therefore, from two of Hick’s works we have an indication of a tradition of appealing to religious experience to defend the rationality of religious belief. Given the references that Hick has supplied, he conceives of this tradition in terms of a broad argument that, in the absence of reasons to doubt or in the absence of special considerations, it is rational to trust that what one experiences is actually the case. Unless there is good reason to doubt, what seems to be so is probably so. Kvanvig sees this general approach as a “clear advance” over attempts to provide proofs for the existence of God. I do not agree with this estimation and for two reasons. Specifically with reference to Plantinga, we will see that although he is within this tradition, he makes a claim to truth that is not appropriate within this particular type of defence of the rationality of religious belief. This type of defence is a minimal defence of the rationality of religious belief. It does not provide grounds sufficient to claim to

⁵Hick, John. “Review Article. Anthony Flew. *God and Philosophy*,” *Theology Today* 24 (1967):87. I am taking Hick’s argument from his recent publication “*An Interpretation of Religion*.” I will also show that his basic position on the rationality of religious belief was established in his work “*Faith and Knowledge*” first published in 1957. The specific criticisms of this position are taken from Anthony Flew’s “*The Presumption of Atheism*.” See further below for details concerning this criticism.

⁶Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: Macmillan. 1989. P.216. For details concerning the writers who have adopted this approach see Pp.229-230, Footnote 3. Plantinga’s book *God and Other Minds* does not include any developed argument to do with grounding the rationality of religious belief in religious experience. His argument is that the theist is in the same position in terms of believing in God that we are all in terms of holding beliefs about the mental states of other persons. There is no good evidence from which we can infer that a person is, for example, in pain, but we do nonetheless hold such beliefs as this and this is a case of believing rationally. See Plantinga, Alvin. *God and Other Minds. A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 1967. Part 3.

know that there is a God. Secondly, and connected with this, the position is a retreat to a minimal position of rationality.⁷

Hick's defence of the rationality of religious belief begins with the distinction between the logical possibility of doubt concerning the reality of the external world and the practical certainty that characterises our actual experience of this world. Thus, Hick notes that whilst it has been impossible to prove the reality of the external world, the fact of the matter is that, in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, we find it impossible to doubt the reality of the external world. We are "*so constituted that we cannot help believing and living in terms of the objective reality of the perceived world.*"⁸ He writes that, "... *it is only on the basis of this trust that we can have reason to distrust particular moments ...*"⁹ In other words, according to Hick, and rightly so, we presuppose the general veridicality of our experience. Our belief that there are such things as trees, that objects do not cease to exist when we stop looking at them, is not based on our experience. These fundamental beliefs are presupposed in our experience.

Hick writes that we live in terms of Swinburne's principle of credulity, the principle that things are as they seem.¹⁰ Swinburne's credulity principle actually states that in the absence of "*special considerations*" we are entitled to trust our experience or in the absence of special considerations we are entitled to trust that things are as they seem.¹¹ Clearly enough, if there were special considerations that called into question the veridicality of our perceptual experience in toto, then we would not be justified or rational in trusting that our experience as a whole is veridical. Having added

⁷See for example Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1991. Pp.254-276. Swinburne states the principle of credulity on P.254. See also Broad, C.D. "*Arguments for the Existence of God. II.*" *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1939):160-161 for a similar principle. This paper is reprinted in Broad, C.D. *Philosophy and Psychical Research*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1953. P.197. Kvanvig, J. "*Credulity*," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984):101.

⁸Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.213.

⁹Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.213. On the definition of veridical see Oakes, Robert A. "*Religious Experience, Self-Authentication, and Modality De Re: A Prolegomenon*," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no.3 (1979):220.

¹⁰Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. Pp.213-214. Hick does not actually refer to the common sense attitude of the everyday life world but it is clear enough that the term, as defined earlier in the thesis, is apposite.

¹¹Swinburne. *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1991. P.254.

the appropriate caveat, we may continue with Hick who transposes this argument to the case of belief in God and argues that the believer experiences God's reality and cannot help living in terms of God's reality. Hick writes that, "*It seems that a sufficiently vivid religious experience would entitle a man to claim to know that God is real.*"¹² Although Hick here refers to having "an experience" previous comments make it clear that he is thinking of religious experience much more broadly as the whole of a person's experience in so far as they are religious. He writes that the condition for the rationality of the religious belief is that God's reality be given in the experience of a believer in a "*powerful, persistent and intrusive way.*"¹³ Hick grounds the rationality of religious belief not in a particular experience of the individual but in "*compelling religious experience.*"¹⁴ Hick writes that,

... what we designate as sanity consists in acting on the basis of our putatively cognitive experience as a whole ... One who has a powerful and persistent sense of living in the presence of God *ought*, therefore, to be convinced that God exists. Accordingly the religious person, experiencing life in terms of the divine presence, is rationally entitled to believe what he or she experiences to be the case - namely that God is real, exists.¹⁵

For Hick, then, God's reality is a constant reality in the same way that the environment with which we interact is a constant reality. When Hick refers to theistic belief as foundational belief, he has in mind, not a particular belief, but belief in God in general. It is against the background of this general and presupposed belief that there can be particular mistakes or misperceptions.¹⁶ Analogously, in terms of perceptual beliefs, he

¹²Hick, John. *Faith and Knowledge*. London: Macmillan. 1988. P.210.

¹³Given Hick's position he would I think have difficulty maintaining a consistent position here. For Hick it is not quite clear what is given in religious experience. It can not be God since according to Hick all conceptions of the ultimate reality are phenomenal representations of a noumenal reality. He would have to talk in general terms of it being rational to believe that there is a noumenal reality.

¹⁴Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.221.

¹⁵Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.216.

¹⁶Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.224.

has in mind not particular perceptual beliefs but the general belief that there is an external world with which we interact.¹⁷ Hick writes of this state of affairs as follows.

... we discover and live in terms of a particular aspect of our environment through an appropriate act of interpretation; and having come to live in terms of it we neither require nor can conceive of any further validation of its reality. The same is true of the apprehension of God. The theistic believer cannot explain *how* she knows the divine presence to be mediated through her human experience. She just finds herself interpreting her experience in this way. She lives in the presence of God, though she is unable to prove by any dialectical process that God exists.¹⁸

Believers experience God in all that they do and say; in, for example, worshipping and praise, in the beauty of nature.¹⁹ His claim that believers live with a continued awareness of the presence of God is supported by an example from William James.

God is more real to me than any thought or thing or person. I feel his presence positively, and the more as I live in closer harmony with his laws as written in my body and mind. I feel him in the sunshine or rain; and awe mingled with a delicious restfulness most nearly describes my feelings. I talk to him as to a companion in prayer and praise, and our communion is delightful. He answers me again and again, often in words so clearly spoken that it seems my outer ear must have carried the tone, but generally in strong mental impressions. Usually a text of scripture, unfolding some new view of him and his love for me, and care for my safety. I could give hundreds of instances, in school matters, social problems, financial difficulties, etc. That he is mine and I am his never leaves me, it is an abiding joy. Without it life would be blank, a desert, a shoreless, trackless waste.²⁰

¹⁷Hick actually refers to these as the framework propositions in terms of which we live. Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.213. It is unfortunate that he has taken the term "framework proposition" from an essay by Kai Nielsen in which Nielsen is actually arguing that belief in God as a framework proposition is questionable in a way in which the framework proposition that there is an external world is not. According to Nielsen, to raise doubts concerning the reality of the external world, is to engage in artificial philosophical speculation. Questions about the reality of God are, he argues, real questions that we find. See Nielsen, Kai. "Religion and Groundless Believing." In Runzo, J and Ihara, C.K. *Religious Experience and Religious Belief. Essays in the Epistemology of Religious Experience*. USA: University Press of America. 1986. See especially P.25.

¹⁸Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.214. See Hick. *Faith and Knowledge*. P.118 for the same quotation. In terms of my claim that Plantinga's position is not new it is important to note that Hick gave this basic position in his work "*Faith and Knowledge*." This reference is to the 1988 reissue of the second edition. The reference is taken from chapter five which remains unchanged from the original 1957 edition. In that edition, the quotation is on P.132.

¹⁹Hick. *Faith and Knowledge*. P.96.

²⁰James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Great Britain: Collins. 1985. P.85.

James writes that probably thousands of unpretending Christians would give a similar account. Therefore, according to Hick, religious experience is, for the believer, analogous to our experience of the external world. God is as real for these people as the objects of the environment are real for all those in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world. In Hick's defence of the rationality of religious belief, it is the general trust in the veridicality of our perceptions that is foundational. Therefore, just as, in the absence of special considerations it is reasonable to trust the veridicality of our perceptual experience as a whole, so, in the case of religious experience, it is rational for the believer to accept their religious experience as a whole.

Having written that we generally trust our experience, Hick then adds the caveat that although we operate on the principle of credulity, the principle that "*what one perceives is probably so*," this fact needs to be qualified.²¹ One of the examples that he gives is that if one is under the influence of alcohol then what seems to be the case may not be so. One might say that the belief is not formed in the appropriate conditions. It is, he writes, rational to accept our perceptual experiences as veridical only if there is no reason to doubt that this is so.²² Here we are to think in terms of reasons to doubt particular experiences and these doubts have their place against the background of a general trust in the veridicality of experience.²³ Whilst it is certainly true that, given certain conditions, we should not trust our perceptual experiences, this fact has, in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, no ramifications for our "framework belief" that there really is an external world with which we interact. The possibility of error is, in terms of perceptual beliefs, always and only, the possibility of particular perceptual errors. In this attitude, the common sense attitude, nothing ever calls into question the reality of the external world.²⁴ We can see this from the examples that Hick gives.

As an example of a doubt that would call into question framework beliefs of our perceptual experience, the case of the excess of alcohol will not suffice. It does not give positive reason to doubt that there is an external world or that there really are objects

²¹On the principle of credulity see Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1991. Pp.254-276. The principle is stated on P.254.

²²Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.215.

²³Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.213.

²⁴Presuming continued sanity.

relative to ourselves.²⁵ Therefore, to read Hick consistently, we have to say that we never doubt framework propositions and within the context of never doubting these, there are particular mistakes on particular occasions. The doubts about the reality of the world are always theoretical doubts and Hick can not, within the logic of his position, introduce them. He has already moved out of the tradition in which they have a place, the tradition of doubting the reality of the external world. He gives what we might term realistic doubts about particular experiences. We can say that despite numerous particular perceptual errors we continue to take for granted the general reliability of our perceptual experience. Special considerations do not call into question the whole of our perceptual experience. In the case of belief in God, we will see that the doubts may, for Hick, undermine the whole of the believer's experience.

When it comes to the case of belief in God, we see that the argument has a similar structure with the difference that the theoretical possibility of doubt about religious experience as a whole is, potentially, more than theoretical. Hick argues that we are not free in the area of religious belief to believe whatever we wish. The caveats placed on belief in God are, that it must not be the case that there is evidence that God does not exist.²⁶ For example, it must be the case that the concept of God has not been shown to be incoherent. In addition, the belief must cohere with the rest of what we know²⁷ and there are criteria in accordance with which we judge whether the belief is true. Most of us would, for example, judge that the religious beliefs of Jim Jones were not true.²⁸ Finally, believers may be concerned with whether an experience is an experience of God or, rather, from the devil.²⁹ We should note, first of all, that the final area of doubt about the veridicality of a particular religious experience, is not the sort of doubt that would call in to question the general trust that there is a God. The analogue in the case of perceptual experience would be making a perceptual mistake on a particular occasion. To discover that an experience was in fact from the devil would be to remain very firmly within the Christian way of looking

²⁵Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.215. I am drawing on a general point made by Phillips. He makes this point in discussing the similar position of Plantinga. Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.49.

²⁶Hick. *Faith and Knowledge*. Pp.210-211.

²⁷Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.219.

²⁸Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.217.

²⁹Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. Pp.216.-217 and P.224.

at things. Considering other beliefs that conflict with belief in God, or considering alternative explanations for belief in God, are cases of questioning one's framework belief that there is a God. Questioning whether an experience is from the devil or from God can only occur with the framework belief that there is a God in place. Atheist and theist can, in principle, question whether belief in God is called into question by scientific beliefs. Only a believer can question whether an experience is an experience from God or from the devil since one needs to be within the Christian way of looking at things to raise this question.

Finally, Hick accepts the possibility that religious experience in its entirety may be delusory and in order to overcome the issue of the practical aspect of doubt in the case of belief in God, Hick suggests that whilst there is the theoretical possibility of doubt, this does not impinge upon the everyday religious experience of the believer living life in the presence of God or in conscious awareness of God's reality mediated through the environment.³⁰ He is, therefore, arguing that the theoretical possibility of error does not impinge upon the practical experience of the believer. The difference between the case of perceptual beliefs and religious beliefs is this; that in the latter case Hick has given content to, and rejected as a theoretical possibility, the possibility that religious experience as a whole is delusory. In the case of perceptual belief, he failed to give content to the idea of any serious doubt concerning the veridicality of perceptual experience as a whole.³¹

We have seen that in Hick's theory we live in terms of the credulity principle and that, in the case of perceptual experience, there are particular mistakes on particular occasions. These mistakes do not undermine our general trust in our experience. In the case of belief in God, believers live in terms of the presence of God but with the knowledge that it is always theoretically possible that their experience is as a whole delusory.³² In the case of doubt's about God's reality, Hick overcame the point about theoretical doubt by arguing that in practice believers do not doubt.³³ From the perspective of the evidentialist

³⁰Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.228. It would, he writes, be irrational to base one's life on a theoretical possibility.

³¹Thus, Hick would be in agreement with Nielsen that theistic belief differs significantly from the belief in the reality of the external world. There may be real doubt concerning the veridicality of religious experience as a whole. See note 12 on Nielsen.

³²Hick. *Faith and Knowledge*. Pp.118-119.

³³We should remember that this point comes from *An Interpretation of Religion* published much later than the article that I am using from Flew.

objector, there is an important difference between the two cases. Anthony Flew considers the possibility that a person may be rational in believing in God just in virtue of having the appropriate sort of religious experience. He acknowledges that there are cases in which a claim to knowledge can be grounded in experience so that one needs no evidence, in the form of other beliefs that one holds, to justify the claim to know.³⁴ Whilst admitting all of this, Flew says that we can challenge the,

... the vital assumption that having religious experience really is a kind of perceiving and hence a sort of being in a position to know about its putative object.³⁵

In other words he will allow that there can be direct experience rather than inferential knowledge but denies that religious experience really is a kind of perceiving. Flew also considers that the diversity of religious experience provides a positive reason to doubt that religious experience per se is veridical. He makes it quite clear that he would share Hick's position on credulity, stating that he is not starting from an extreme Cartesian skepticism, questioning everything that is questionable. Flew's own position is a common sense position, taking it for granted that we are secure in a number of our beliefs. One might say that Flew conceives of asking whether religious experience is really a form of perception and asking whether religious diversity calls the fundamental beliefs of Christianity into question, sensible questions that we find or that find us.³⁶ Flew is presupposing that in the case of our perceptual experience there are no rationally significant alternative explanations for perceptual experience as a whole. The argument that we might be totally deluded in believing that our perceptual experience is, on the whole veridical, must rest on contrived philosophical arguments that play upon the logical possibility of doubt. These arguments have no place in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world. In the case of religious experience, the doubts do not seem contrived, but rather genuine doubts that we find in the lives of the believers.³⁷

³⁴Flew, Anthony. *The Presumption of Atheism*. London: Elek/Pemberton. 1976. P.25.

³⁵Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism* P.26. Flew is making use of Hick's 1967 review article on his own work "God and Philosophy." See Footnote 5.

³⁶Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. P.24.

³⁷For the argument that philosophical doubts about the reality of the external world are not rationally significant see Scriven, Michael. *Primary Philosophy*. New York and London: McGraw Hill. 1966. Ch.1. On the logical possibility of error see Yandell, Keith E. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1994. Ch.8. Flew's objection to Hick's claim concerning the rationality of religious belief was

3.3 Alvin Plantinga's Defence of the Rationality of Religious Belief

Before considering Plantinga's position we should be clear about the importance of the credulity principle and the concepts associated with it for Hick's defence of the rationality of religious belief. The first is that in appealing to the credulity principle, Hick gives content to the way in which God's reality is mediated in the life of the believer. It is on the basis of compelling religious experience that the believer trusts that things are as they seem. Secondly, it is in the context of this basic trust that talk of making mistakes or forming particular beliefs has its sense. Finally, and most importantly, that we are entitled, in the absence of "special considerations" to trust our experience. Therefore, when full content is given to the credulity principle, we see that it has a role that goes beyond defending the right to trust one's experience.

There are a number of potential replies to Flew. For example, that faith and reason are necessarily mutually exclusive.³⁸ One may suggest that belief cannot argue with unbelief but only preach to it.³⁹ Alternatively one may reply that there is in fact sufficient evidence to justify belief in God or that although there is insufficient evidence to support belief in God, the situation is ambiguous enough to allow for belief. Alternatively the believer might argue, that we are, in the absence of evidence, rational in believing any number of propositions and that religious propositions are amongst these. Plantinga engages in negative apologetics and adopts this final argument. In doing this, Plantinga is concerned with showing that the believer can be justified, in the absence of evidence, in believing and even in claiming to know that God exists.

made before Hick developed his pluralist theology. This theology constitutes an answer to the objection that religious diversity calls into question the rationality of religious belief. The point about this is not whether Hick's position does successfully defeat the argument from religious diversity but, rather, the fact that religious diversity does call into question the claim that there we are "endowed" with a natural capacity to experience God.

³⁸On this issue see Lad Sessions, William. "Religious Faith and Rational Justification," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982)145-146.

³⁹Flew attributes this position to Barth and rejects it on the grounds that the history of Christian apologetics is evidence that there is something to be said for the truth of Christian beliefs. See Flew, Anthony. *God and Philosophy*. London: Hutchinson and Co. 1974. PP.9-10. It is not clear that those who have provided arguments for the existence of God ought to be understood as offering reasons to believe that God exists. See on this Smith, John E. *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1968. Ch.5. Finally, one could say something for Christian belief without providing reasons to accept those beliefs. One could engage in negative apologetics, showing, for example, that a criticism of Christian faith is misconceived. Mavrodes, George I. "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited." In Plantinga, Alvin and Wolterstorff, Nicholas, eds. *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1991. P.97.

John Hick makes reference to Alvin Plantinga's work "*Reason and Belief in God*," writing that if he has understood Plantinga's position correctly, then his own work and Plantinga's work on the rationality of religious belief "*virtually coincide*."⁴⁰ Whilst it is true that the two works are similar, there is a reason to prefer, in general terms Hick's work. It is far more consistent and the reason for this is his explicit use of the credulity principle. Plantinga's work differs from Hick's in that Plantinga thinks of the belief that God exists as based upon the more particular beliefs of the subject. He thinks of the belief that there are trees as based upon the belief of subject s that she sees a tree.⁴¹ In some ways Plantinga has moved towards a more common sense epistemological position, but he remains a foundationalist in epistemology and it is, I think, this fact that renders his position untenable. He still thinks that the belief that God exists must be based on something and, therefore, he bases it on particular beliefs of the subject.⁴² However, once this mistake is remedied, Plantinga's defence of the rationality of religious belief provides a full argument against the claim of Flew that the believer must provide positive reason to think that there is a God. It is, therefore, a very useful supplement to Hick's basic position. Therefore, in the following sections I will show that Plantinga made a mistake about the epistemological status of the belief that God exists and, in the next chapter I will show that he can provide a defence against the evidentialist claim that the believer must have positive reason to think that God exists.

William Alston writes of Plantinga's essays on the epistemological status of religious belief that they constitute,

... a powerful challenge to the customary philosophical ways of thinking about the epistemic status of religious belief and that they have decisively altered the terms in which the problem must be posed

...⁴³

⁴⁰Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.212, Footnote 12.

⁴¹There is reason, in the case of Plantinga's position on perceptual beliefs, to qualify this statement. In more recent publications Plantinga has given up this specific claim. However, he now seems entirely unclear on the epistemological status of general perceptual beliefs. In the case of belief in God he still endorses the claims that he makes in "*Reason and Belief in God*." That is, that the belief that God exists is based upon the particular beliefs of the subject. See further below on this.

⁴²Phillips writes that "... the ignoring of the critiques of foundationalism by Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin, different though they are, is one of the more curious feature of the Reformed philosophers' reading of the history of recent philosophy." Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.38.

⁴³Alston, W.P." Plantinga's Epistemology of Religious Belief." In Tomberlin, James E and Van Inwagen, Peter. *Alvin Plantinga*. Dordrecht, Boston and Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company. 1985. P.289.

and Gary Gutting writes that,

Take Plantinga and D.Z. Phillips, two of the most prominent Christian philosophers of religion. They've both done excellent work in showing the confusions and non sequiturs of intellectual attacks on belief, but they give us little idea of why we should believe, or why they themselves believe. At the best they seem to be saying that they've a right to accept their particular version of Christianity as a matter of personal opinion. Certainly there's little or nothing either says to make someone who doesn't believe uncomfortable in his unbelief.⁴⁴

In the rest of this chapter I will take issue with these claims. The first point that we need to be clear about is the claim that Plantinga has done nothing to show us why we should believe; this evinces a misunderstanding of the work of both Plantinga and Phillips. Neither Plantinga or Phillips conceive of their work in terms of positive apologetics. Phillips understands his work on religious belief as descriptive.⁴⁵ Plantinga is engaged in a project of negative apologetics; that is, a project of showing that a particular argument against the believer is misconceived.⁴⁶ As a project of negative apologetics, Plantinga's work does not aim to establish that there is a God. His aim is only to show that the evidentialist challenge is, in terms of the question of the rationality of religious belief, misconceived. His aim is to show only that the believer does not need to have evidence in order to be justified in believing in God. As Plantinga has made it clear that this is his aim, his work cannot be criticised for failing to do anything to establish that there is a God unless it can be shown that the logic of his position actually entails that he must engage in positive apologetics. As I will show in the next chapter this is just what his position does entail.⁴⁷ John Hick's work on the rationality of religious belief ought to be understood in the same way. It is not an attempt to "prove" that there

⁴⁴Gutting, Gary. "The Catholic and the Calvinist," Faith and Philosophy 2, Part 3 (1985):237.

⁴⁵ Phillips. *Faith after Foundationalism*. Pp.95-96.

⁴⁶On negative apologetics see Mavrodes, George I. "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited." In Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*. Pp.197-199. Caroline Franks Davis reads Plantinga's work *Reason and Belief in God* as offering an argument from religious experience to the existence of God. Franks Davis, Caroline. *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1989. P.87. This is a mistake. Plantinga is arguing only that the believer is herself justified in her belief that God exists. He is not trying to argue that there is a God and would not conceive of religious experience as evidence that there is a God. On this latter issue see Gutting, Gary. "The Catholic and the Calvinist," Faith and Philosophy 2, Part 3 (1985):243-244.

⁴⁷Plantinga's more recent work goes beyond negative apologetics. Here I am referring only to "Reason and Belief in God."

is a God but an attempt to show that it is reasonable for a person to believe that there is a God.⁴⁸

Secondly, Alston's essay on Plantinga makes use of three of Plantinga's essays, published in 1979, 1980, and 1981.⁴⁹ There is, therefore, *prima facie* reason to wonder whether Plantinga has decisively changed the parameters of the discussion concerning the rationality of religious belief. As we saw above, Hick recognises that his own work has a place in a tradition of arguing that religious experience can directly justify religious belief. Plantinga's position is, as we shall see, analogous to that of Hick. Even if we ignore the work of the earliest authors, as early as 1957 in Hick's work "*Faith and Knowledge*", there is a defence of the rationality of religious belief, on the grounds of religious experience; essays written from 1979 onwards can not be said to constitute a challenge to the customary ways of thinking about the rationality of religious belief if those customary ways of thinking have been established for a considerable period of time. Finally, there is reason to wonder whether he has done "good work" in this area. I mean by this that Plantinga seems to have taken a considerable period of time to establish a position that is analogous to that of Hick and which is still beset by problems caused by a failure to explicitly acknowledge the need for the principle of credulity in his defence of the rationality of religious belief.

Plantinga rejects Flew's claim that it is not rational to accept propositions about God unless one does so on the basis of other propositions that constitute evidence for them. According to Plantinga, there are many propositions, not based upon other propositions constituting evidence for them, that we can, quite properly, believe and even claim to know. He terms these propositions basic propositions and, if we are justified in believing them, then they are properly basic for us.⁵⁰ In order to have a full understanding of Plantinga's defence of the rationality of religious belief, there is a need to know something about foundationalism in epistemology. According to Plantinga, most evidentialist have been foundationalists, and, thinks Plantinga, the presupposition that there must be evidence to support the belief that God exists derives from accepting

⁴⁸Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.212.

⁴⁹Alston. "Plantinga's Epistemology of Religious Belief." Pp.289-311.

⁵⁰Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.39.

what earlier forms of foundationalism had to say concerning which beliefs might be properly basic beliefs, which beliefs might be properly believed without evidence.⁵¹ The first thing to say about this is that Anthony Flew is not a foundationalist. Flew, as I made clear in the previous section, is asking straightforward questions within a common sense attitude. In terms of Hick's argument that it is rational to believe what is given in one's experience, Flew is saying just that this would not seem to be the case for religious experience and religious beliefs. Foundationalism and the whole tradition of foundationalist epistemology does not come into it for Flew. My reason for mentioning this is that Plantinga has allocated a considerable amount of his time to showing that the previous versions of foundationalism were misconceived. It is not clear that this is a major issue for philosophers like Flew.⁵² In fact, one can go even further and say that it is clear that Flew is not concerned with previous forms of foundationalism. The reader will remember that I wrote in my introduction that my epistemological position might be characterised as critically realistic. This is the appropriate point to return to this issue. Flew's epistemological position is, in this respect similar to my own. He is raising questions about belief in God from within a critically realistic epistemological position. I am acknowledging this point together with the fact that his objections to belief in God are real objections, objections accepted by believers themselves. However, as we have seen, these questions are, for believers, considered from within the Christian perspective or Christian world view, a way of looking at things that is grounded in faith, in encounter with God, in a realised truth.

A foundationalist conceives of the beliefs that a person has as divided into foundational beliefs, or basic beliefs and superstructure beliefs that are, in some way, based upon the foundational beliefs. A basic belief is a belief not based on any other

⁵¹Alston suggests that not all evidentialists are necessarily foundationalists. Alston. "Plantinga's Epistemology of Religious Belief." Pp.295-296. Plantinga's reply to this point makes it clear that he can conceive of no alternative to foundationalism. He can not see that there is a common sense understanding of evidence. Plantinga, Alvin. "Replies to My Colleagues." In Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, eds. *Alvin Plantinga*. Pp.389-390.

⁵²See for example Plantinga. *Reason and Belief in God*. Pp.39-62. He continues with his attention to foundationalism in more recent publications. See, for example, Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Ch.10. Alston raises this question whether the evidentialist challenge must be conceived of as having a place within a foundationalist epistemology. Alston, William P. "Plantinga's Epistemology of Religious Experience." In Tomberlin, James E and Van Inwagen Peter, eds. *Alvin Plantinga*. Dordrecht, Boston and Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company. 1985. Plantinga's reply makes it clear that he can not conceive of a common sense understanding of evidence. Plantinga. "Replies to My Colleagues." In Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, eds. *Alvin Plantinga*.

belief of subject s. It is, as Audi writes, psychologically direct or non-inferential in that it is not based on any other belief; it is not a belief that is inferred from another belief.⁵³ It is not just any belief that can be a foundational belief but, according to previous forms of foundationalism, beliefs that exhibit certain epistemic immunities. These beliefs that we have, foundational and superstructure, are, according to Plantinga, a part of our noetic structure where a noetic structure is a set of propositions that a person believes together with the epistemic relations that hold among him and these propositions.⁵⁴ A superstructure belief is a belief based on a foundational belief. It may, for example, be deduced from a foundational belief or rendered probable by a foundational belief.⁵⁵ In the chapter on the evidentialist challenge the point was made that there is a normative component to the evidentialist challenge; that is, the evidentialist was making a claim about the way in which we ought to believe. According to Plantinga, the same is true of foundationalism. Foundationalism is a thesis or set of theses about how we ought to structure our beliefs.⁵⁶

Plantinga remains a foundationalist, but a foundationalist of a new sort. He rejects former versions of foundationalism with their stringent requirements on which beliefs might be in the base of a noetic structure. He eschews the previous epistemic immunities that, for example, the beliefs in the base of the superstructure should be self evident or incorrigible or indubitable or infallible.⁵⁷ As Rose Ann Christian writes,

⁵³Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." P.143.

⁵⁴Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.48.

⁵⁵Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.48-49 and 83 on a subject's noetic structure to be discussed below. On foundational structure see Audi, Robert. *The Structure of Justification*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1993. Pp.50-51.

⁵⁶Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.48. This normativity can be conceived of in different ways. It might, for example, be conceived of in terms of as deontological. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Pp.72-73. In the case of the normative component of the evidentialist challenge, I wrote that the normativity might be derived from observation of the way in which we do hold our beliefs. One might make the same case for the normative component of the foundationalist thesis.

⁵⁷For Plantinga on foundationalism see Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.47-63. See also Plantinga, Alvin. "Is Belief in God Rational?" In Delaney, C.F., ed. *Rationality and Religious Belief*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1979. Pp.13-27. D.Z. Phillips misreads Plantinga as arguing that it is incorrigible propositions of sense experience that are basic for subject s. This is a surprising mistake considering Plantinga's lengthy refutation of previous forms of foundationalism. Plantinga has since made it even clearer that the basic beliefs are not incorrigible propositions of sense experience. Phillips, D.Z. *Faith After Foundationalism*. Pp.43-48. For a completely clear statement by Plantinga on this issue see Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Pp.95-97. This

Plantinga is a “*man of the people*” surveying “*actual epistemic practice*” in order to determine which of our beliefs are basic and, in the right conditions, properly basic.⁵⁸ One can use the term “*fallible foundationalism*” to refer to Plantinga’s position. By this term I mean only that in Plantinga’s epistemological position, the beliefs in the base of a noetic structure do not have to exhibit the traditional epistemic immunities.⁵⁹ There is, according to Plantinga, good reason for rejecting the previous forms of foundationalism with their stringent restrictions on which beliefs might be placed in the foundations of a noetic structure. He argues that, according to these criteria, the previous forms of foundationalism are, themselves, irrational. The belief that one’s beliefs must be either self evident or incorrigible or indubitable or derived from beliefs that are either self evident or incorrigible or indubitable is not itself self evident or indubitable or incorrigible and can not be derived from beliefs that are self evident or incorrigible or indubitable.⁶⁰

The sorts of beliefs that Plantinga considers as examples of beliefs that can be properly believed, in the appropriate circumstances, without evidence are these: the belief of subject s that she sees a tree; the belief of subject s that she had breakfast this morning; the belief of subject s that that person is in pain; the belief of subject s

material was previously published in Plantinga, Alvin. “*The Foundations of Theism: A Reply*,” Faith and Philosophy 3, part 3 (1986):303-306.

⁵⁸Christian, Rose Ann. “*Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness and Metaphysical Pluralism*,” Religious Studies 28, vol.4, (1992):558. See Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” Pp.59. Plantinga writes that if we accept the criteria of previous forms of foundationalism then we must accept that we do not know much of what we think we know. Since this consequence is false there is something wrong with the previous forms of foundationalism. For example, I may know that I had lunch this afternoon. I do not know this on the basis of any other propositions constituting evidence for it. It is basic for me and I am justified in believing it even though it is not infallible or incorrigible or indubitable or self evident. Whilst Plantinga is a “*man of the people*” he is, as will become clear below, a confused man of the people.

⁵⁹Audi, Robert.” Direct Justification and Theistic Belief.” P.134.

⁶⁰Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” Pp.58-63. Plantinga has an early predecessor in this area. In 1949 W.T. Stace raised a question concerning what he termed our “*unreasoned beliefs*.” Stace noted that we appear to have many beliefs that are often true which are not cases of immediate knowledge, not beliefs self-justified or basic according to the criteria of the foundationalists, nor beliefs reached by a process of reasoning. He included amongst these beliefs, belief in other minds and beliefs about the reality of the external world. Stace does not so much answer a question as raise one. He writes that it is clear that we are justified in holding these beliefs even though they are not cases of immediate knowledge, nor reasoned beliefs and he argues that philosophers have failed to understand these beliefs because they can conceive of only two types of beliefs; either immediate knowledge or reasoned beliefs. In sum, he raises the question that Plantinga answers, a question to do with how we can be justified in holding beliefs that do not conform to the criteria for immediate knowledge and are not reasoned. Stace, W.T. “*The Problem of Unreasoned Beliefs*,” Mind 54 (1954):27-29 and 48-49.

that God is speaking to her; her belief that God created all of this; her belief that God disapproves of what she has done; her belief that God forgives for what she has done; her belief that God is to be thanked and praised.⁶¹ These beliefs are, according to Plantinga basic beliefs, that is beliefs not based on any other belief of subject s that constitute evidence for them, beliefs grounded in the appropriate experience and, given the right conditions, subject s is rational or justified in believing the proposition in question.⁶² One should conceive of the conditions themselves as having a bearing on the truth of falsity of the belief in question. In some conditions our beliefs seem obviously true. In other conditions, they do not seem obviously true.

For example, subject s forms the belief that she sees a tree because it seems to her that she does see a tree. The belief is, in the appropriate conditions, immediately justified by the perceptual experience. Forming the belief that person p is in pain is based upon the experience of seeing person p exhibiting typical pain behaviour. Subject s is, given the appropriate conditions, immediately justified in believing that person p is in pain just in virtue of seeing person p exhibit typical pain behaviour. Forming the belief that she had breakfast this morning is the result of seeming to remember that she did have breakfast this morning. Forming the belief that God created all of this is based upon the perceptual experience of seeing, for example, a flower. One is immediately justified in believing that God created all of this just in virtue of having the experience of seeing a flower.

I can locate what I perceive to be one of Plantinga's fundamental problems in his articulation of the way in which we hold our beliefs and in the comparisons that he is making. First, in terms of the way in which we hold our beliefs, articulating the nature of belief in God excludes any reference to the reality of God in the life of the believer. Plantinga is concerned wholly with beliefs and relations between beliefs. He gives no place to James' passional nature in articulating the nature of belief in God. There is no sense of the way in which God's reality is given in the life of the believer, no reference to the significance of belief in God for the believer. In chapter one I wrote that if the debate is given content in terms of a subject wanting to know that God exists. This sort of reply is not an account of the way in which believers know that there is a God. It is

⁶¹Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.80.

⁶²On beliefs grounded directly in experience see Audi. *The Structure of Justification*. P.129.

an account of an abstract and theoretical kind, an account that does not, as Alston would say, “hook up, in any manner with the way in which we do hold beliefs”.

Secondly, and connected with this, there would seem to be something amiss in a reply that compares belief in God with the belief that one sees a tree or the belief that one had breakfast this morning. We will see below that Plantinga’s argument leads critics of his position to claim that the belief that there is a God is not analogous to the belief that one sees a tree. One of the most fundamental reasons for this is that the belief that there is a God is a belief that the subject wants to hold, a belief that is, for the subject, significant in their lives. Plantinga could have avoided these inevitable criticisms by acknowledging that belief in God is nothing like believing that one sees a tree.

Just as we have, writes Plantinga, a natural capacity, given to us by God, to apprehend, amongst others, perceptual truths, so we have a natural capacity to apprehend truths about God.⁶³ Thus, both perceptual beliefs and beliefs about God are amongst the deliverances of reason or beliefs that derive from our natural cognitive capacity.⁶⁴ By a deliverance of reason Plantinga means a belief that is utterly obvious, or immediately certain, a belief that all rational people will accept; such beliefs need no support from evidence.⁶⁵ Plantinga counts amongst the deliverances of reason many beliefs that would not be so counted by traditional foundationalists, eschewing the usual epistemic immunities that would have to attach to a deliverance of reason in favour of arguing that it is not only self evident beliefs but basic perceptual truths and beliefs for example about other persons.⁶⁶ Plantinga writes that,

Belief in the existence of God is in the same boat as belief in other minds, the past and perceptual objects; in each case God has so constructed us that in the right circumstances we form the belief in question. But then the belief that there is such a person as God is as much among the deliverances of reason as those other beliefs.⁶⁷

⁶³Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” P.91. Recently Plantinga has provided an argument to support the contention that God has constructed us or designed us so that we form the appropriate beliefs in the appropriate conditions. See Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Chs.11 and 12.

⁶⁴Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” P.90.

⁶⁵Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” P.70.

⁶⁶Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” P.89.

⁶⁷Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” P.90.

The disagreement between believer and non-believer is, according to Plantinga, over what counts as a deliverance of reason or over what is given in terms of natural human capacity.

In the case of, for example, perceptual beliefs, we have at least some idea of the way in which these beliefs are formed. The formation has to do, in part at least, with sensory input and perceptual organs and brain processes. Plantinga suggestion is that we have a religious “capacity” analogous to our “perceptual capacity.”

When the Reformers claim that belief in God is properly basic, they do not mean to say, of course, that there are no justifying circumstances for it, or that it is in that sense groundless or gratuitous. Quite the contrary. Calvin holds that God “reveals and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe,” and the divine art “reveals itself in the innumerable and yet well ordered variety of the heavenly host.” God has created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us. More precisely, there is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God* or *this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or think about the vast reaches of the universe.⁶⁸

This innate disposition may be triggered in any number of circumstances and, if the conditions are appropriate, then the believer will be rational in forming and believing certain propositions about God. Plantinga gives a host of other examples.

Upon reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him. Upon having done what I know is cheap, or wrong, or wicked, I may feel guilty in God’s sight and form the belief that *God disapproves of what I have done*. A person in grave danger may turn to God, asking for his protection and help; and of course he or she than has the belief that God is indeed able to hear and help if he sees fit. When life is sweet and satisfying, a spontaneous sense of gratitude may well up within the soul; someone in this condition may thank and praise the Lord for his goodness, and will of course have the accompanying belief that indeed the Lord is to be thanked and praised.⁶⁹

These, then, are the experiences and the beliefs that are based upon them. In at least one case we are dealing, as Plantinga made clear, with God’s revelation in nature. This revelation might take a propositional form or the form of God Himself being

⁶⁸Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” Pp.66 and 80.

⁶⁹Plantinga. “Reason and Belief in God.” P.80.

revealed in nature.⁷⁰ If it is God himself then it would seem to be a case of what Alston would refer to as indirect perception, of somehow perceiving God through another object. In this case it is said that the divine presence is mediated. God is experienced through other objects or events. If it is propositional revelation or information about God, then we are dealing with what Alston would call indirect perceptual recognition.⁷¹

Any failure to see that beliefs about God are amongst the deliverances of reason or that there is a natural capacity, given by God, to form beliefs about God is attributed to the fact of sin. Although Plantinga does not make this claim himself, he does discuss it as a part of his presentation of Calvin's position on belief in God, a position with which he "*enthusiastically*" concurs and an epistemological position which he would "*urge*" us to accept.⁷² Those who do not see that the belief that God exists is amongst the deliverances of reason are in a state of sin. If they were not in a state of sin then they would all see that the belief that God exists is utterly obvious. The person who does not believe in God is, writes Plantinga, in an epistemically substandard position, like a man who does not believe that his wife exists or believes that she is a cleverly constructed robot. The notion of sin is required in order to explain why it is that beliefs about God are not amongst the deliverances of reasons for everyone where "everyone" will include, paradoxically, any number of intellectually able Christians who do not see that these beliefs are amongst the deliverances of reason.⁷³

The role of the innate disposition is, as Audi recognises, explanatory. It fills out, in a way that Hick's thesis does not fill out, the process by which God's reality is mediated. It is clear that Plantinga has in mind the idea that if we were functioning properly, then we would all form these sorts of beliefs given the right circumstances. Just as we naturally form perceptual beliefs if all is well, so we would all form beliefs about God if all was well. We can, I think, agree with Basinger that if we ignore the question of the "origin" of these faculties then Plantinga is offering a plausible account

⁷⁰On this issue see Pike, Nelson. "John of the Cross." In Audi and Wainwright, eds. *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment*. Pp.27-28.

⁷¹Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.20-22. For an example of indirect experience of God see Mavrodes, George I. *Belief in God. A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1970 PP.67-68.

⁷²Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.65-67, 73 and 90 respectively.

⁷³Gutting, Gary. *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1982. P.84.

of the way in which these particular beliefs are actually formed.⁷⁴ Atheists will not, of course, agree with this account of the way in which religious beliefs are formed. They will deny the existence of a natural disposition to believe in God. Plantinga, however, is claiming only that this is what the community of believers do believe. He is not seeking the agreement of non-believers that there is a natural disposition to believe in God.⁷⁵ The question whether we, and more importantly, believers themselves, can ignore the question of the origin of this supposed faculty is one to be considered in asking the question whether the believer is justified in believing these propositions. This question is answered in the next chapter on whether belief in God can be properly basic.

Plantinga's position on the rationality of religious belief appears to be analogous to that of Hick. However, it is not. The reason for this is that Hick, as we saw, argued that the general beliefs that we hold are presupposed in our experience. We do not question them and can conceive of no further justification for them. Plantinga's conception of the place of these general beliefs is different. Plantinga writes that since the belief that one sees a tree entails that there are such things and trees and since the belief that God is to be thanked and praised entails the belief that there is such a person as God, subject s is justified in believing that there are such things as trees and that there is such a person as God.⁷⁶ In fact, he says more than this. He says that we believe in the "existence of trees" on the basis of the belief that we see a tree and that the believer believes in God on the basis of the belief that God is to be thanked and praised.⁷⁷

⁷⁴Therefore, the fact that Plantinga has since argued that our capacity to form these beliefs has been given to us by God is no defence against the criticism that I am going to raise. The question that follows is whether the theist can assume that her religious belief forming capacity is reliable. There is good reason to question this assumption.

⁷⁵Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.77-78.

⁷⁶Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp 18 and 81- 82.

⁷⁷Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.81. Plantinga still maintains this position on belief in God, that it is based on the more particular beliefs. See Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. P.212. Footnote 24. His current position on the relation between particular perceptual beliefs and the more general beliefs is no longer clear. He maintains his position on the proper basicity of particular perceptual judgements but is now aware that we have background beliefs such as the belief that there are such things as trees. He has not, however, articulated the relationship between the two. For an early version of his current position see Plantinga, Alvin. "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," Faith and Philosophy 3, Part 3 (1986):303-306. See now Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Ch.5. See *ibid*. P.217 for the acknowledgement that there

This is, as I have been arguing, a mistake. The sorts of beliefs that Plantinga now sees as general beliefs are not based upon the more particular experiences which are in turn formed in the appropriate circumstances. The belief that there are trees is presupposed in the fundamental experience and in the formation of the belief of subject *s* that she sees a tree. Subject *s* does not believe that there are such things as trees on the basis of her belief that she sees a tree. Similarly, subject *s* does not believe that there is such a person as God on the basis of her belief that God is to be thanked and praised. Her belief that God is to be thanked and praised presupposes that there is a God and her belief that she sees a tree presupposes that there are such things as trees. These are beliefs that we do not formulate and do not question. We do not believe them on the basis of other beliefs that we have. Plantinga is resting his case against previous forms of foundationalism on an appeal to our actual practice of forming beliefs.⁷⁸ In our actual practice of forming beliefs, we do not believe that there are trees on the basis of the belief that we see trees. There is a sense in which we do not really believe these general propositions at all, if we mean by believe having a propositional attitude. These beliefs are just there, unquestioned in our actual belief formation. Plantinga has, then, made a mistake, a mistake which derives from his adherence to foundationalism as an epistemological model. He remains convinced that these general beliefs must be based on some other beliefs that we have; he does not see that they are presupposed in our experience.

3.4 Basic Beliefs

In this section I consider the critical discussions concerning whether the beliefs that Plantinga has identified are really cases of basic beliefs. None of these critical discussions take issue with his articulation of the relationship between his basic beliefs and the belief that there is such a person as God or his basic perceptual beliefs and the more general belief that there are such things as trees. They concern themselves wholly with whether his particular basic beliefs are really cases of basic beliefs. Through considering the questions raised in this discussion, I will show that Plantinga's narrow conception of the basing relation allows him to maintain that these

are many background beliefs.

⁷⁸See footnote 58.

beliefs are basic beliefs. However, these beliefs can only be basic, in Plantinga's sense of basic, given that the believer has an entire "set" of background beliefs within which these particular beliefs may be basic. In other words, one can only give content to these particular beliefs as basic beliefs if one conceives of the believer as having a certain picture of the world or as presupposing a number of other beliefs. Plantinga's failure to articulate this fact, or possibly, even to see this fact, leaves his basic beliefs without a context. We are left with no sense of the way in which it is possible for these beliefs to be basic beliefs.

We can start with Stewart Goetz who claims that the sorts of beliefs that Plantinga discusses are crucially different from the belief of subject *s* that she sees a tree. In the case of the belief of subject *s* that she sees a tree, subject *s* is aware of an object. In other words, this is an object experience.⁷⁹ Therefore, if Plantinga is to maintain that these beliefs are analogous to the previous examples, then they must be rephrased to include an awareness clause. Reformulated in terms of awareness, Plantinga would have to claim that subject *s* is aware of God speaking to him or that subject *s* is aware of God having created all of this or that subject *s* is aware of God as forgiving his sins. If we are to say that subject *s* is aware of God as doing these things or as having created all of this, then we must think in terms of some "special" type of religious experience, a case of either direct or indirect awareness of God.

Mark McCleod denies that we can read Plantinga's examples in these ways. He writes that these do not seem to be "special" religious experiences but, rather, experiences that we all have. McCleod sees a difference between the examples of mundane beliefs offered by Plantinga and the religious beliefs that Plantinga considers. McCleod terms the mundane beliefs, given by Plantinga, first-level beliefs. By this he means that for any subject *s* who has experience *e*, the appropriate belief will be formed. For example, any subject *s* who has the sort of experience associated with seeing a tree will form the belief that she sees a tree. Any subject *s* who has the sort of experience associated with the forming the belief that person *p* is in pain will form the belief that person *p* is in pain. The religious beliefs that Plantinga considers are, he argues, crucially different. Any subject *s* who has the characteristic sort of experience

⁷⁹For the distinction between object and aspect experiences see Yandell. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Pp.37-38.

that Plantinga gives will not necessarily form the associated religious belief.⁸⁰ Thus, the belief of subject *s* that God created all of this is not analogous to the belief of subject *s* that she sees a tree. It is what McCleod terms a second level belief.

Second level religious beliefs are, writes McCleod, analogous to the more complex second level mundane beliefs. The belief that God created all of this is not, for example, analogous to the second level mundane belief of a dendrologist that he sees an oak tree. This is a second level belief in the sense that an identificatory concept is required, not possessed by all subjects. However, in this case all that one needs is, writes McCleod, an identificatory concept. The subject in question has another belief that allow the tree to be identified as an oak tree. His final case, in summary form, is the formation by subject *s* of the belief that her husband has gone hiking. Subject *s* does not know this directly since she has not been told in any direct manner that her husband has gone hiking. This belief is formed in association with some complex background beliefs concerning the behaviour of her husband, background beliefs that allow her to see directly that he has gone hunting.

I will now develop two points and raise a third issue to which I will return in chapter four. First, given the way in which Plantinga conceives of the basing relation, he can plausibly maintain that these beliefs that he has identified are basic beliefs for subject *s*. Secondly, that this is only so if he concedes that they are basic within a way of looking at things or against the background of a complex set of beliefs. This is something that he must concede in order to give a context to the way in which they are basic Third, that once this latter point is understood the question whether these are basic beliefs seems somewhat hollow.

The first thing that I will show is that Plantinga can plausibly maintain that these beliefs are basic beliefs. The fact that he can maintain this has to do with his narrow conception of the basing relation.⁸¹ At the time of writing "*Reason and Belief in God*," Plantinga conceived of the necessary condition for subject *s* believing *A* on the basis of *B* as subject *s* believing both *A* and *B*. The sufficient condition for subject *s* believing *A* on the basis of *B* is subject *s* believing *A*, believing *B*, believing that *B* is good

⁸⁰McCleod. Mark. "*The Analogy Argument for the Proper Basicity of Belief in God*." Pp.11-12.

⁸¹On this issue see Quinn, Phillip. "*In Search of the Foundations of Theism*," Faith and Philosophy 2, Part 5 (1985):482-484.

evidence for A, and believing that he believes A on the basis of B. He has become more circumspect stating now that it is difficult to give exact conditions for this relation and that, minimally, it is a necessary condition of believing A on B that subject s believe both A and B. Even those who differ over the nature of the basing relation do not deny that it is a necessary condition of basing A on B that one believe both A and B.⁸² Therefore, we can take as our guide to whether these beliefs are basic the condition that if A is to be based on B, then subject s must believe both A and B. It is the minimum condition of believing both A and B that allows Plantinga to maintain that these beliefs are really basic beliefs.

In critically considering the question whether these beliefs are basic beliefs Robert Audi uses, as examples of non-religious beliefs, the following two beliefs.⁸³; (1) I see a tree; and (2) that person is in pain. One procedure for determining whether a belief of subject s is a basic belief is to ask subject s how she knows, for example, that she sees a tree. Audi argues that if this procedure were employed, then one would discover that the belief of subject s that she sees a tree is not based upon any other belief constituting evidence for it. According to Audi it is difficult to give content to the idea that there are any other beliefs involved in the formation of the belief of subject s that she sees a tree. If it is the case that there are no other beliefs involved in the formation of the belief then the belief of subject s that she sees a tree can not be based on any other belief.

In employing the same method for determining whether the belief that a person is in pain is a basic belief, Audi concludes that it is not a case of a basic belief. If, writes Audi, subject s forms, at time t, the belief that person p is in pain, then this may be the sort of belief that is, in actual fact, based on other beliefs of subject s. The reason he

⁸²Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp. 49 and 52. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Pp.69-70. His reason for the greater circumspection may be the realisation that there are competing conceptions of the conditions for a belief being based on another belief that constitutes evidence for it. Robert Audi for example argues that A may be based on B, even though subject s does not take B as evidence for A, subject s does not reason from B to A, and subject s does not accept but simply forms belief A. Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." Pp.146-147. See also Audi. *The Structure of Justification*. P.55 and Audi, Robert. "Belief, Reason and Inference," *Philosophical Topics* 14, No.1 (1986):31-33. Audi still assumes, in both essays, that subject s will have to beliefs A and B. Therefore, there is evidence, from a writer who disagrees with Plantinga's initial characterisation what it is to base a belief on another belief, of agreement that subject s believing both A and B is a necessary condition of A being based on B.

⁸³These are taken from Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief."Pp.143-147.

writes this is that he thinks of other beliefs as involved in the formation of the belief that person p is in pain. If we ask subject s why he believes that person p is in pain, then subject s would cite reasons why she believes that person p is in pain. An example of such a reason would be that subject s believes that person p cut herself and cried out. It would appear, writes Audi, that the best explanation of the ease, speed and spontaneity with which subject s can give a reason is that he already believes some proposition such as that person p screamed, on the basis of which he believes that person p is in pain. Typically there would be some fact that subject s observed which he took to be an indication of pain, in a way implying that the belief that person p is in pain is based on his believing this fact. According to Audi, these other beliefs would normally be called evidence. We are not talking about a conscious process of reasoning here. Audi says that these other beliefs are acquired “*unselfconsciously*.”⁸⁴ In the case of believing that person P is in pain, there do seem to be other observed facts. The question is whether we would want to say that these constitute evidence for subject s that person p is in pain.

From the fact that, if asked, one might cite reasons for believing that one sees a tree or reasons for believing that person p is in pain, it does not follow that one believes that one sees a tree or that person p is in pain on the basis of these other beliefs. Here we can make a distinction between believing that p at time t and believing that p at time t* and employ Plantinga’s necessary condition for believing that p on the basis of the proposition that q. That necessary condition is that one believe both propositions and since, ordinarily and in the cases given, we do not form any other belief at time t, the belief that p can not be based at time t on any other belief.⁸⁵ Continuing with the question whether the beliefs that he cites are basic beliefs, Plantinga argues that if at time t* and in response to a question concerning the belief of subject s that p, subject s cites an experiential proposition, it does not follow that at t* subject s believes that p on the basis of an experiential proposition.

Robert Audi also questions whether the religious beliefs that Plantinga considers are cases of basic beliefs and he does so for the same reason that he denies that the

⁸⁴Audi, Robert. “Direct Justification and Theistic Belief.” P.144.

⁸⁵Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. P.94. Plantinga writes that there is a difference between a dispositional belief and a disposition to believe. One may be disposed to believe an experiential proposition but from this it does not follow that at time t one had a dispositional belief.

belief of subject s that person p is in pain is a basic belief. In the case of subject s believing that God disapproves of what she has done, Audi argues that her belief that God disapproves of what she has done might be based on her belief that she has done wrong and that God knows what she has done and disapproves of wrong doing. The belief of subject s that God has created all of this, might be based on the more general belief that God created the earth. The final example is the belief that God is speaking to subject s. Is it not more likely that subject c hears a voice with special characteristics and on the basis of believing those characteristics to be present, she believes that she is being spoken to by God?⁸⁶

Plantinga has a quite consistent reply to all of these examples. If the belief in question is to be based on a second belief then the subject must, at time t, hold both beliefs. Since this is not the case they are basic beliefs. Audi, acknowledges the fact that there will in fact be cases of beliefs that are basic beliefs.⁸⁷ This fact, per se, is sufficient to render his entire discussion of this matter somewhat hollow. Audi does not see that the important question has to do with the context in which these are basic beliefs. If we return to the point by McCleod, the belief is a basic belief against the background of or in the context of a "complex web" of background beliefs. Although other beliefs are involved, there is no conscious process of reasoning, no taking other beliefs as evidence for the belief that her husband has gone hiking.⁸⁸ Similarly, I would suggest that in the case of the believer, McCleod is wrong to suggest that the believer infers from these other background beliefs to the belief in question. Plantinga can counter this with his narrow conception of the basing relation.⁸⁹ It is, however, now clear that in order to provide a context for these other beliefs, Plantinga must acknowledge that they have their place within a way of looking at the world.

Robert Audi writes that there are two reasons to be concerned with whether the beliefs that Plantinga gives are really basic beliefs. First, that the question is important just because if these beliefs are not basic beliefs then Plantinga has made a mistake.

⁸⁶Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." Pp.145-147.

⁸⁷Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." P.144.

⁸⁸McCleod. "*The Analogy Argument*." Pp.16-17.

⁸⁹McCleod. "*The Analogy Argument*". P.19.

It is difficult to argue with this but, as we have seen, he can maintain that they are basic beliefs. Secondly, Audi argues, that if these beliefs are not really basic beliefs, then subject s must do something to justify the beliefs upon which they are based since if the belief that p is based upon the belief that q one can only be justified in believing that p if one is justified in believing that q.⁹⁰ Audi gives absolutely no content to the conditions in which one would have to justify the belief that q. Since this question of being justified has to do with the conditions for the formation of the belief, I will return to this issue in chapter four. It will suffice for the moment to say that his claim, as it stands, has no import.

We saw at the start of this section that Goetz argued that Plantinga must claim the believer is aware of God and that McCleod denied that these are “special” religious experiences involving an awareness of God. I will now return to this issue. In the case of the sorts of experiences that Plantinga considers, it does seem difficult to give content to these as being “special” religious experiences. In the case of God’s revelation in nature, this revelation might take either a propositional form or the form of God Himself being revealed in nature.⁹¹ If it is God himself then it would seem to be a case of what Alston would refer to as indirect perception, of somehow perceiving God through another object. Plantinga might then maintain that the believer is aware of God as having created all of this. In this case that the divine presence is mediated. God is experienced through other objects or events. If it is propositional revelation or information about God, then we are dealing with what Alston would call indirect perceptual recognition.⁹² In a most of the other cases it seems difficult to give content to these being special experiences. For example, the experience of feeling religious guilt is not qualitatively different from feeling mundane guilt. It is the beliefs that the subject holds that allows her to identify it as guilt for sins. The experience of feeling forgiven could not be identified as qualitatively different in such a way that it would be

⁹⁰Audi, Robert. “Direct Justification and Theistic Belief.” P.147.

⁹¹On this issue see Pike, Nelson. “John of the Cross.” In Audi and Wainwright, eds. *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment*. Pp.27-28.

⁹²Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.20-22. For an example of indirect experience of God see Mavrodes, George I. *Belief in God. A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1970 PP.67-68.

distinct from other more mundane examples of feeling forgiven. The same is true of feeling afraid and asking for God's help.⁹³

Even if one were to allow that these experiences are experiences that are qualitatively different, there would still be a need for a complex set of background beliefs to give a context in which the beliefs were formed. To believe that God is able to help in danger, that God forgives one for one's sins, that God is to be praised involves any number of beliefs in the background about the nature of God and His activities. Therefore, the distinction between an awareness of God or a belief related in some way to other beliefs does not hold up. Even if one were somehow aware of God as forgiving, the belief formed on the basis of this experience would have its life within the context of a complex set of background beliefs.

Plantinga points out that there are many types of religious experience.⁹⁴ The variety of religious experiences include experiences which seem to those who have them to be "perceptual experiences" of God or of some aspect or activity of God. The use of the locution "seems to those who have them" is employed to ensure neutrality concerning the veridicality of the experience. It is not meant to imply that it seems to them that they experience God but actually they do not.⁹⁵ The sense of "seems to be" is that they have experiences which they take to be experiences of God or of some aspect or activity of God. For example, a religious experience that the believer might describe as an experience of the presence of God, will be described as an experience that seems to the believer to be, for example, an experience of God.

William P. Alston considers perceptual experiences of God but refuses to employ the term religious experience, preferring instead to talk of "putative direct experiential awareness of God" for which he employs the term mystical perception.⁹⁶ It seems to me that it would be most natural to call these revelation experiences since the experiences that Alston considers are experiences in which God is active; God has to do something

⁹³Proudfoot argues that there are no qualitatively distinct feelings, only feelings interpreted according to context and beliefs. See Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley and London: Cornell University Press. 1985. Ch.3.

⁹⁴Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.81.

⁹⁵Yandell. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. P.16.

⁹⁶Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.34-35.

in order for one to experience Him and it is in this sense that these experiences are revelations of God. God is revealing Himself and God initiates the experience.⁹⁷ It is God Himself who is revealed or some aspect or activity of God rather than propositions about God. Penelhum objects that the word revelation is specifically theological and that it can only be applied by a believer since someone who does not believe that there is a God cannot believe that this God reveals himself.⁹⁸ To say that someone has had a religious experience, however, need only be to say that a person has had an experience in which it seemed to them that God revealed Himself. If one can talk of putative religious experience, then one can to a putative revelation? These are, then, perceptual experiences in which God is directly revealed.

There are modes of perceptual religious experience which are similar to the modes of sensory experience. For example, the notion of hearing the voice of God or of seeing God. People have visual and auditory experiences of God. However, it is also claimed that one can touch God, smell God and taste God and these are surprising.⁹⁹ Alston details further experiences that seem to those who have them to be direct experiences of God. For example, experiences of God's love or of God strengthening or guiding, or of God's power or of God's wisdom or compassion.¹⁰⁰ In the case of perceptual religious experience the question whether these are basic beliefs still remains. We can take one of the problems answered by Alston. That problem concerns how subject s knows that it is an experience of God. Alston's answer to this question is that the subject knows that the experience is an experience of God because God appeared in a way commensurate with the expectations concerning how God would appear. In other words, the subject has a set of background beliefs detailing the nature of God and His activities.¹⁰¹ Audi might argue that the belief that one has experienced God is based upon these expectations or background beliefs about the way in which God would appear. Again Plantinga can rebut this line of argument by

⁹⁷Mavrodes. *Belief in God*. P.53.

⁹⁸Penelhum, Terrence. *Religion and Rationality. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1971. P.164.

⁹⁹Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.52-54.

¹⁰⁰Alston. *Perceiving God*. P.43.

¹⁰¹Alston. *Perceiving God*. P.47.

stating that at time *t* subject *s* did not even believe that God is loving but found herself experiencing God's love. The belief is, however, basic within a way of looking at the world, within a picture in which one believes that God is loving and that God is capable of "revealing" his love. It is the context that allows the belief to be basic. It is what is taken for granted within a way of looking at things that gives content to this being a basic belief. This claim would need to be modified for accounts of experiences of non-believers who come to believe on the basis of an experience of God revealing Himself. In this case one must refer not to identification in terms of beliefs held but in terms of propositions that the subject is aware of. The sorts of propositions that are involved in making the identification are not specific to the community of believers. They are the sorts of propositions that the subject would know about.

3.5 Conclusion

According to Plantinga we have a disposition to believe in God. I want now to show that Plantinga assumes the credulity principle, or assumes that we have this disposition and that it is functioning properly.¹⁰² We can see this from Phillip Quinn's argument concerning Plantinga's claim that these beliefs can be properly basic. Phillip Quinn suggests that Plantinga need not claim that it is propositions such as I see a tree that are basic. Quinn argues that the proposition that I see a tree might be based on the proposition that I seem to see a tree so that it is the latter proposition that is actually basic. If the proposition expressed by I see a tree were based on the proposition expressed by I seem to see a tree, Quinn argues that the proposition that I see a tree would be no less justified. We would, writes Quinn, be justified in believing that we see a tree even if it were based on the proposition that we seem to see a tree.¹⁰³ Quinn's point would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the claim that the belief that person *p* is in pain would be just as secure if based on the belief of subject *s* that it seems to her that person *p* is exhibiting typical pain behaviour.

Plantinga's reply to Quinn is that this is not in fact the case since the belief of subject *s* that she sees a tree or the belief of subject *s* that person *p* is in pain would only be secure if Quinn's posited basic beliefs did in fact provide good evidence for the

¹⁰²Basinger. "Plantinga, Pluralism and Justified Religious Belief." Pp.68-69.

¹⁰³Quinn, Phillip. "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," Faith and Philosophy 2, Part 4 (1985):477-478.

respective beliefs of subject *s* that she sees a tree and that person *p* is in pain. Plantinga accepts the same point that Hick accepts; that this is not in fact that case, and Plantinga embraces, implicitly, the credulity principle, that although we can not prove that beliefs of this sort are true, in the absence of special considerations we trust that they are.¹⁰⁴ Plantinga's epistemological position now necessarily precludes undermining the claim that these are basic beliefs by arguing from a position of extreme skepticism.¹⁰⁵ In the next chapter, through examining the conditions in which these beliefs can be, according to Plantinga, properly basic, I will ask whether the believer can assume that there is such a faculty and the general reliability of the faculty for forming beliefs about God.

¹⁰⁴Plantinga, Alvin. "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," Faith and Philosophy 3, Part 3 (1985):303-306. This same reply is found in Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Pp.95-98.

¹⁰⁵On this point see Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. P.97.

CHAPTER FOUR

Properly Basic Beliefs

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I critically discuss Alvin Plantinga's argument that belief in God can be properly basic. Now that we have seen the mistake in Plantinga's position, the mistake of claiming that general beliefs are based on the more particular beliefs, Plantinga's claim that some beliefs are properly basic has its place within the context of assuming that there are background beliefs that are simply presupposed or taken for granted in the life of the believer. Plantinga's work on properly basic beliefs can now be used to give content to the conditions in which particular beliefs might be properly basic, content that Hick did not concern himself with. By this I mean that where Hick gave, in the case of perceptual beliefs, the example of it not being alright to trust one's experience if one were drunk, Plantinga goes into far more detail concerning the conditions in which it would not be reasonable to hold the belief in question. It is in these details that we can see a potential reply to Flew's claim that there are positive reasons to doubt whether religious experience is veridical. Plantinga argues that even though there are potential "defeaters" for the belief that there is such a person as God, the believer, even the intellectually capable believer, need not provide any positive reason to think that there is such a person as God. I will show that the logic of Plantinga's position entails that the believer must provide evidence to support their beliefs and, that although there is an alternative to returning to argument and evidence for the truth of the beliefs, Plantinga's failure to change the parameters of the debate entails that he has no option but to return to argument and evidence for the truth of the beliefs in question.

4.2 Properly Basic Perceptual Belief

In this section and the next I will continue with the point made in chapter three concerning Plantinga's narrow conception of the basing relation. I will argue that it is because Plantinga is not clear that believers have a total way of looking at things, that his position on properly basic beliefs becomes problematic. To be consistent, Plantinga's theory would have to acknowledge that an intellectually capable theist

would have to have as a part of her background beliefs, beliefs to do with there being no good arguments against the existence of God. I will argue that given Plantinga's narrow conception of what it is to base a belief on another belief, it would be possible for him to maintain that the belief that God is to be thanked and praised is, for subject *s*, properly basic at time *t*, but that it will be the case that for a mature and intellectually capable theist, argument and evidence remain important to belief in God. Belief in God remains evidentially dependent, or related to all of the reasons that an intellectually capable theist has for thinking that belief in God is rational. Plantinga's position is, I will show, implicitly analogous, in this respect, to that of John Hick. However, I will show that since Plantinga claims to know that the Christian position is the right one, he will inevitably have to give reasons to support this claim to know so that this is the case. Transposed to subject *s*, subject *s* will have to give reasons to support this claim to know. Thus, far from changing the parameters of the debate, Plantinga places the believer firmly within the parameters of the evidentialist challenge, leaving her to find reasons to support her claim to know that her own position is the correct one.

Plantinga's position is that there are a number of basic beliefs that are in the appropriate circumstances, properly basic where a properly basic belief is one that subject *s* is rational in believing or justified in believing. In articulating the conditions or circumstances, we are concerned with finding conditions that indicate the veridicality of the experience and the truth of the belief grounded in that experience. According to Plantinga, to be epistemically justified in believing that *p* one must not be violating any epistemic duties in forming and holding the belief and one must not have, in virtue of believing the proposition in question, a defective noetic structure.¹ Therefore, the belief is properly basic for subject *s* if the circumstances in which the belief is formed are such that subject *s* is violating no epistemic duty and does not acquire a defective noetic structure in forming the belief in question. Plantinga has, since writing the above, moved beyond the notion of an intellectual duty preferring instead to understand the

¹Plantinga, Alvin. "Reason and Belief in God." In Plantinga, Alvin and Wolterstorff, Nicholas, eds. *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1991. P.79. David Basinger is the only commentator I have found who is clear that this is Plantinga's conception of being justified in believing that *p*. He also sees that if this is what it is to be justified in believing that *p*, then the sorts of conditions that Plantinga is thinking of are conditions which would not entail subject *s* violating any duty in believing or having a defective noetic structure. Basinger's paper is an extremely lucid account of Plantinga's position. Basinger, David. "Plantinga, Pluralism and Justified Religious Belief," *Faith and Philosophy* 8, no.1 (1991):67-69.

normative component in, for example, the evidentialist challenge as derived from observation about the way in which we do form and maintain our beliefs.² The sense of ought still has to do with a right and a wrong way to hold one's beliefs.

For example, we can see that in many cases, and from an epistemic point of view, the right way to form and to hold beliefs is to consider the evidence both for and against the belief in question and, on this basis, to come to a decision concerning whether or not the belief is true. This is not always the case. For a number of beliefs, we can see that accepting these beliefs on the basis of the testimony of others is, from an epistemic point of view, the right way to form and maintain the beliefs. In the case of belief in God, and according to Plantinga, one ought to believe in God on the basis of faith and one ought not to believe on the basis of argument. Plantinga writes that,

If my belief in God is based on argument, then if I am to be properly rational, epistemically responsible, I shall have to keep checking the philosophical journals to see whether, say, Anthony Flew has finally come up with a good objection to my favourite argument. This could be bothersome and time consuming; and what do I do if someone does find a flaw in my argument? Stop going to church.³

Plantinga gives examples of exemplars of the faith who have believed in God in the right way, drawing upon Calvin who appeals to the way in which the prophets and apostles believed. Although Plantinga still maintains the notion of an intellectual duty, he is appealing to the way in which Christians have believed in order to support his contention about how they ought to believe. It is not that it is self evident that Christians ought to respond in faith but that from the evidence of the exemplars of the faith one can see that making faith contingent upon evidence is the wrong thing to do. According to Plantinga, then, to make faith contingent upon evidence would be wrong. One would not be believing as one should. The believer who responds in faith is believing as she ought to. Therefore, if a Christian were make belief contingent on evidence, the Christian would not be believing as they ought to. Plantinga writes that "*the Christian ought not to believe on the basis of argument.*"⁴

²See Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Pp.45-46 and Pp.210-21.

³Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.67.

⁴Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.67.

The second condition is that a person should not have, in virtue of believing the proposition in question, a defective noetic structure. A person's noetic structure is, as we saw in the previous chapter, "*the set of propositions he believes, together with certain epistemic relations that hold between him and these propositions*".⁵ One might, for example, have a defective noetic structure if one believed the proposition that God is loving whilst also believing the proposition that the argument from evil makes it highly improbable that there is an all loving God. One's noetic structure might be defective if one believed that one experienced God but also that it is impossible to experience God. Finally, one's noetic structure would be defective if one formed the belief in question whilst having good reason to believe either that there is no "mechanism" for forming beliefs about God or that there is good reason to wonder whether that mechanism is reliable. In the case of perceptual beliefs, one's noetic structure would be defective if, for example, one had good reason to suppose that one's perceptual organs were not functioning properly.

In the case of belief in God, and *prima facie*, the first and second conditions would seem to conflict. The first condition states that one ought to have faith in God and avoid argument and evidence since argument and evidence will make one's faith unstable. The second condition is that one must not have a defective noetic structure and, it would seem, the only way to ensure that one's noetic structure is not defective would seem to be considering argument and evidence. This point becomes especially problematic since, argues Plantinga, evidence and argument are not irrelevant to basic belief in God. Plantinga writes that having an argument to defeat a potential evidential challenge constitutes a part of the conditions in which the believer is justified. Thus, the believer may have to know that there is a good counter argument to the problem of evil in order for belief in God to be basic for the subject.⁶ In articulating this aspect of his theory we will see how he conceives of argument and evidence having a place within properly basic belief in God.

I will show, first, the way in which Plantinga conceives of the method of arriving at the conditions in which beliefs are properly basic and then, having considered the case of perceptual beliefs, argue that whilst there is, given Plantinga's narrow

⁵Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.48.

⁶Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.85.

conception of what is involved in basing a belief on another belief, a case to be made that these beliefs are properly basic, these beliefs are, given the logic of his position, only properly basic for subject *s*, an intellectually able theist, if subject *s* is aware that there are no good arguments against the existence of God. It is only possible for these beliefs to be properly basic for an intellectually capable theist, if that theist knows that there are no good arguments against the existence of God. Whilst Plantinga can, given his conception of the basing relation, maintain that these beliefs are, for subject *s* who has experience *e* at time *t*, properly basic beliefs, it is the continued argument in general that maintains the possibility of these being properly basic beliefs. Ironically, Plantinga's most recent work is a part of the activity of argument that maintains the possibility of these beliefs being properly basic for subject *s* at a certain time. Once again, therefore, we will see that Plantinga's position needs to be articulated in terms of the believer having a picture of the world or a total way of seeing things. It is only if we conceive of the believer having this picture of the world that we can give content to these beliefs being properly basic beliefs for the believer.

Plantinga writes that the way to determine the conditions for properly basic beliefs is to start from very clear examples of such beliefs and arrive, inductively, at the conditions for properly basic beliefs. There will be sets of beliefs and conditions "*such that the former are obviously properly basic in the latter.*"⁷ In addition to clear examples of beliefs that are properly basic, one must take sets of beliefs and conditions where it is not so clear that former are properly basic in the latter and sets of beliefs and conditions where the former are obviously not properly basic in the latter. This second point is, as I shall make clear in the final chapter, an important part of the defence of the rationality of religious belief. I have already articulated the credulity principle; that in the absence of special considerations one is justified in taking that experience as veridical. It is only if we have an idea of conditions in which the belief would not be properly basic, that we can give content to the conditions in which it would be properly basic. It is only if we can say what would not count as the appropriate conditions that we can give content to the belief being justified for subject *s* in certain conditions.

⁷Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.76. In articulating the conditions I will be referring also to Plantinga's more recent work. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1993. Chs.1 and 2. This work has developed over a period of time. See, for example, Plantinga, Alvin. "Justification and Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987):403-420 and Plantinga, Alvin. "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988):32-47.

Finally, writes Plantinga, the sets of beliefs and conditions should be open to revision in the light of argument.

Plantinga's procedure for determining which beliefs are properly basic differs from the procedure of previous forms of foundationalism. Plantinga is appealing to our actual experience, to the way in which we do form beliefs in order to arrive at the standards in accordance with which these beliefs are justified. He is concerned with common sense claims to believe and even to know.⁸ He is also clear that it is only the community of believers who can start from examples of properly basic religious beliefs.⁹ We have seen that Plantinga's position on properly basic beliefs does not provide a context within which these beliefs are properly basic. Once again, we need to include reference to this context in order to give content to the fact if asked whether there are examples of properly basic beliefs, we will, immediately reply in the affirmative. This is more readily understandable if we conceive of the position of the believer as analogous to that of a subject deciding that there are quite clearly examples of properly basic perceptual beliefs. In other words, if we think of the believer as having a particular way of looking at things.

If asked to find examples of beliefs that are obviously properly basic, one's immediate reaction is that there are, in the case of, for example, perceptual beliefs clear examples of properly basic beliefs. The same is true in the case of beliefs about whether other persons are in pain. There are conditions in which it is obvious to subject s that she sees a tree, conditions in which it is obvious to subject s that person p is in pain. circumstances or conditions in which these beliefs seem obviously true. The explanation for the immediate judgement that there are clearly cases of properly basic beliefs has to do with how much we do not question in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world. It seems clear to those in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world that we do have the appropriate set of perceptual organs, that there is a world that is given and with which we interact, that we are not systematically deluded. Barring special considerations such as insanity, we all share the general belief that there are objects external to us, that we do perceive what is actually the case, that

⁸Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.75-76.

⁹Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.77-78.

we are not systematically deceived in our perceptual activities. It is because we operate on the principle of credulity that we can make this immediate judgement.

Now that we are clear that this is a common sense epistemological position in which a number of beliefs are presupposed or taken for granted, we can see the explanation for why we can be justified immediately in believing that we see a tree or that person p is in pain. I will first give examples of the sorts of conditions that Plantinga has in mind and then discuss these conditions in terms of Plantinga's point that one is justified in believing that p if one is believing as one ought to and if one does not acquire, in virtue of holding the belief, a defective noetic structure. Finally, I will question, in the case of perceptual beliefs and other beliefs in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, how important it is from an epistemic point of view that these beliefs be properly basic beliefs. I will argue that there are examples of beliefs of this sort that that can be based on evidence and that one would be just as secure in believing them.

In terms of conditions in which one is immediately justified in believing that one sees a tree, Plantinga is concerned with the following. Very broadly, one must be having the appropriate sort of experience, have no reason to doubt that one's perceptual organs, in this case one's eyes, are functioning properly, and one must be in a situation which does not itself give reason to doubt the veridicality of the experience.¹⁰ The experience must for example, be perceptual or an object experience as opposed to an aspect experience of imagining that one sees a tree, or of sitting in one's living room thinking about seeing a tree.¹¹ In terms of not having reason to wonder whether one's perceptual organs are functioning properly, one would not, for example, be justified in believing that one sees a tree if one were at a considerable distance from the object of experience and aware that one's eyesight was not good enough to identify objects at a distance. Since justification comes in degrees, one might say that subject s would be justified to some degree in believing that she sees a tree. Finally, in terms of the outward circumstances, Plantinga is thinking in terms of aspects of the environmental

¹⁰Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." Pp.79-80. Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York and Oxford; Oxford University Press. 1993. Chs. 1 and 2 and specifically on perceptual experience Ch.5. On conditions see also Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." Pp.148-149.

¹¹On object and aspect experiences see Yandell, Keith E. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Cambridge USA: Cambridge University Press. 1994. Pp.37-38.

situation that would give reason to doubt the veridicality of the experience. It is interesting to note that in terms of giving content to aspects of the environment that would give reason to doubt, Plantinga gives a contrived example. For example, one would not be justified in believing that one sees a tree if one were told that there are lot of fake trees in the area.¹² If one did believe with the knowledge that there are fake trees in the area, then one would have a defective noetic structure.¹³ One would believe a proposition whilst having reason to doubt the truth of that proposition. Therefore, in the appropriate conditions, subject s would be justified in believing that she sees a tree; there would be nothing wrong with the way in which the belief was formed and she would not acquire a defective noetic structure by so believing. We have an idea, then, both of the conditions in which the belief that one sees a tree would be justified and the conditions in which it would not be justified.

In the case of perceptual experiences, and the beliefs grounded in them, there are a number of other conditions which must, in principle, be capable of being met, conditions that must obtain if it is to be the case that the belief formed is likely to be true. These conditions are not as obvious as the above. Beliefs with existential import, beliefs about objects relative to a subject, have two other characteristics. If we take specifically the case of believing that one sees a tree, then a characteristic of this belief is that it can be checked by one's other senses and that a second subject similarly placed would also form the belief in question. These conditions have to be met if it is to be the case that the belief in question is likely to be true. The following example will evidence the way in which these checks and tests are important and also the consequences for the belief if it were not possible to carry them out.

Subject s walks into a dimly lit room and sees what seems to be a coiled rope in the corner. The room is dimly lit and subject s wonders whether this might not, in fact, be a snake. Subject s ought to, where the sense of ought is that it would have been a good thing to do from an epistemic point of view, carry out various tests in order to determine whether the object is a piece of rope or a snake. The situation is suitably ambiguous to call for further investigation. The object is not moving and this lends

¹²Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.77.

¹³Given the position in chapter two on evidence determining the belief subject s would, I think, find it impossible to continue to hold the belief that she sees a tree.

weight to the idea that it is a rope but then he remembers that snakes become torpid in the winter and that as it is winter this may account for the fact that it is not moving. The colour of the object is the colour of rope but the man knows that this is also the colour of a particular type of snake. The man continues to weigh up the possibilities but finds that he cannot come to a decision. The weight of evidence for each belief is roughly equivalent.¹⁴

In this case, his seeming to see a rope will not let him decide the issue. His visual perception is not sufficient to come to a conclusion about whether or not it is a snake. Perhaps it is a rope. There are various options open to him. First, he can approach the object and listen for a hissing sound. There is no hissing sound but then if the snake has become torpid for the winter there would not be. Two of his senses would not appear to be of use here. His sense of taste is not going to help him and neither is his sense of smell. He cannot employ these senses in order to decide the issue. His sense of touch, however, might be of help. If we consider that he is either brave or foolhardy, he may approach the object reach out and touch and his tactile sense will allow him to make a decision. If the object feels as snakes generally feel, smooth and dry then he will have a basis for a decision. If it feels rough like a rope then it is not a snake. So the first point is that he can employ his other senses in order to decide whether his perception is veridical. Therefore, in the case of a perceptual belief based on perceptual experience, we might include the condition that there be the potential for testability.

The next thing is that we can predict certain further experiences on the basis of an assumption about what it is that we are perceiving. For example, if this is really a snake that subject s sees, then if he pokes it with a stick, it will move. A piece of rope will remain static. We can add a caveat about special considerations to cover the possibility that the snake is dead or that it is in such a torpid state that it is not going to move if poked with a stick but there is a general sense that one can make predictions about the behaviour of certain objects and on the basis of these predictions one can verify whether the experience is really an experience of the object in question. There is a third way in which subject s might determine whether this is a snake or a rope.

¹⁴This example is taken from Schultz, Alfred and Luckmann, Thomas. *The Structures of the Life World. Vol. 1*. Translated by Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr. London: Heinemann. 1974. Pp.185-186.

Subject s might enlist the help of subject p who, similarly placed, will be in a position to view the object in question and help in determining whether the object is a snake or a rope. Both of these people can now make a decision on whether it is a snake or a rope and public testability has a lot to do with whether we are really perceiving what we seem to be perceiving.

From a practical point of view it is clear that the possibility of carrying out checks and tests is important. From an epistemic point of view, a perceptual belief such as this must be capable of being subjected to tests and checks of this sort. If one attempted to carry them out and discovered that the perceptual belief could not be investigated in any of these ways, then the belief would have no existential import. That is, the subject would now have reason to think that the experience was not, after all, an object experience but, rather an aspect experience such as a case of hallucination. We would no longer be dealing with a case of possible misperception but a case in which one would wonder whether one had actually seen anything.

We have seen that Plantinga is concerned with our actual practice of forming beliefs, that his epistemological position is a common sense position, concerned with circumstances from our actual practice of forming beliefs. He is concerned with practical certainty concerning our beliefs. Given this position, subject s can be justified in believing the propositions in question because subject s lives in terms of the credulity principle. Subject s can assume a certain perceptual capacity and assume the general reliability of this perceptual capacity. In order to be justified in believing that p at time t and on the basis of experience e, subject s does not have to have any positive reason to consider her experience in general as veridical or any reason to believe that she has the requisite perceptual organs. Her experience in general and the agreement within a particular cultural context give her the right to simply assume the general reliability of the beliefs formed on the basis of experience. Given the appropriate conditions she just is justified in believing that she sees a tree.

Even if we agree with Stanley Cavell that the sorts of doubts raised in the older epistemological tradition are not completely unnatural in the sense that they can, for philosophers, arise "naturally" and that having arisen they have their place within a philosophical context, it is still the case that these sorts of doubts do not have a home, even for philosophers, in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world. The

most that we can say is that these sorts of doubts may arise in a reasonably natural way for some philosophers and that having arisen they present a problem for the philosopher qua philosopher. They do not present a problem for the philosopher qua common sense individual interacting with an objective environment.¹⁵ They can not be introduced within the context that Plantinga is considering. We can only introduce doubts that we find and we do not find, in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, doubts about whether there is really an external world. We do not find doubts about the veridicality of experience as a whole.

If we take the case of subject *s* believing that person *p* is in pain, then one would have to introduce significant doubt into our assumption that a person exhibiting pain behaviour is really in pain. Plantinga writes that,

... although some propositions ascribing pain to a person are incorrigible for *him*, no such proposition is incorrigible for anyone else. We cannot observe the thoughts and feelings of another; so we cannot determine by observation that another is in pain. How then do we know that another is in pain? What is our evidence?¹⁶

He continues that in a perfectly ordinary sense of see, we can of course see that a person is in pain.¹⁷ In the attitude of common sense, what other kind of sense of “see” could there be? If for example, subject *s* comes upon a person lying on the ground, and sees that the leg of person *p* has been severed, subject *s* will form the belief that person *p* is in pain. Furthermore, subject *s* would be perfectly justified in claiming to know that person *p* is in pain. There would be absolutely no doubt in the mind of subject *s* about this. If there were a question of evidence, and one wonders how there could be and also who would ask such a question, then subject *s* would point to the fact that the person in question is writhing around on the floor and screaming and suggest that losing a limb without the benefit of anaesthetic will generally lead to pain. There is no further question here. Subject *s* would certainly not be concerned with the logical possibility of error; with whether person *p* is really in pain.

¹⁵Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1989. Pp.79 and 191.

¹⁶Plantinga, Alvin. *God and Other Minds*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 1966. P.188.

¹⁷Plantinga. *God and Other Minds*. P.189.

In the common sense attitude we simply take a number of beliefs for granted and the arguments against them are not rationally significant. We are, for example, justified in assuming the general reliability of our perceptual experience, justified in assuming that persons exhibiting typical pain behaviour are generally in pain. That is, we operate on the principle of credulity. Following Plantinga we can say that a person who operates on this principle is believing as he ought to, where the sense of ought is believing in accordance with the way in which one may believe and not acquiring by so believing a defective noetic structure. Failure to consider extreme philosophical skepticism does not constitute a case of failing to believe as one ought to; nor does it constitute, even if one knows about these arguments, a case of acquiring a defective noetic structure. We are justified in presuming the reliability of our senses.¹⁸

There are two further significant points about these particular beliefs. The first is that no particular experience will call into question the framework propositions presupposed in our particular experiences. No matter how many mistakes we make in our perceptual experience, these mistakes are always made within the context of assuming the general veridicality of experience. The second is that given this context of common sense, and the fact that we do not doubt these framework propositions, the significance of showing that these beliefs can be properly basic beliefs is, from an epistemic point of view, not entirely clear. By this I mean that these beliefs might be based on other beliefs of subject *s* and that subject *s* might be just as justified in believing them.

In the previous chapter I wrote that Robert Audi claimed that there are two reasons to be concerned with whether the beliefs that Plantinga has considered are really basic beliefs. The second reason was that if the belief that *p* is based on the belief that *q* then one must justify the belief that *q* if one is to be justified in believing that *p*. He gave no content to that point. Let us imagine that there is, just briefly a question, whether person *p* is in pain and that subject *s* goes through a rapid process of reasoning. One does not have to think in terms of strange philosophical examples to give content to this. Perhaps subject *s* is walking down the street, sees person *p* lying in the road and apparently in pain and fails to form immediately the belief that person *p* is in pain. After a rapid process of reasoning, subject *s* forms the appropriate belief.

¹⁸Basinger. "Plantinga, Pluralism, Justified Religious Belief." P.70.

We might allow that this is not, according to Plantinga, a basic belief. Are the epistemic consequences of any import? Audi wrote that one would have to do something to justify these other beliefs but this does not appear to be the case. One would be justified in believing that person *p* is in pain just in virtue of believing these other propositions.¹⁹ Plantinga can not conceive of the beliefs being based on other beliefs with the same degree of epistemic justification because he thinks of the question of basing these beliefs on other beliefs as taking one further away from being justified. That is, he can only think of the question whether these beliefs are based on other beliefs as one that would call into question his basic beliefs.²⁰ In the case such as that just given, however, the belief of subject *s* that person *p* is in pain would seem to be no less well justified just because it is based on other beliefs of subject *s*. One might construct cases in which the fact that the formation of the belief did require a process of reasoning leads to the belief being less justified for subject *s*. However, this fact is logically distinct. In the case I have given, the belief would not seem to be any less justified.

The rationality of perceptual beliefs has to do, then, with the proper functioning of perceptual organs and with outward conditions.²¹ In the natural attitude we take for granted a perceptual capacity and have an idea of what would constitute a defect in the capacity and the sorts of outwards conditions that would lead to misperception. I am not claiming that we can give a set of sufficient conditions for the proper basicity of, for example, the belief that one sees a tree. We do, however, have a clear idea of the sorts of conditions that are necessary. Although we may not know the conditions that are sufficient, we do, as I wrote above, have a very good idea about the conditions that are necessary. We also have a good idea of the sorts of conditions that would give reason to doubt that one's perceptual experience is veridical. If we were to refer to normal

¹⁹Alston, William P. "Plantinga's Epistemology of Religious Belief." In Tomberlin, James E and Van Inwagen, Peter. *Alvin Plantinga*. Dordrecht, Boston and Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company. 1985. Pp.290-292. In replying to Alston, Plantinga ignores Alston's point. See Plantinga. "Replies to my Colleagues." In Tomberlin and Van Inwagen. *Alvin Plantinga*. Pp.385-394. We will see below that he also ignores the same point when put to him by Phillip Quinn.

²⁰Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Pp.95-96. This material is taken from a paper in which Plantinga is replying to a point made by Phillip Quinn. Quinn, Phillip. "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," Faith and Philosophy, part 4 (1985):476-478. Plantinga, Alvin. "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," Faith and Philosophy 3, Part 3 (1986):303-306.

²¹Christian, Rose Ann. "Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness, and Metaphysical Pluralism." Religious Studies 28, vol.4 (1992):.564.

observers in normal conditions, we may be unable to give sufficient conditions for a normal observers in normal conditions but we have a clear idea of what constitutes unusual situations. For example, perceptual organs not functioning correctly due to a physical a defect; perceptual organs not functioning correctly due to an ingestion of drugs or the imbibing of large quantities of alcohol; anomalies in the environment; known causes of illusion such as a stick that appears bent in water and so on. The fact that one could not articulate the sufficient conditions for a properly basic perceptual belief does not undermine the claim that there are clearly cases in which a belief grounded in the appropriate type of experience would be a case of believing rationally.

4.3 Properly Basic Belief in God

In this section I consider the conditions in which belief in God can be for subject s properly basic. I adopt the same procedure that I adopted for considering the question whether perceptual beliefs can be properly basic. The conditions for belief must be such that the believer believes as she ought to and is within her epistemic rights in so believing and she must not acquire by forming the belief, a defective noetic structure. Plantinga clearly thinks of this state of affairs as possible. There are beliefs formed in certain conditions such that these beliefs are properly basic. To show that belief in God can not be properly basic, one must show that the believer would be violating an epistemic duty or not within her epistemic rights in so believing or acquiring in virtue of so believing a defective noetic structure.

Before considering this question, we should note that Plantinga has recently published an argument for the existence of God.²² This is not inconsistent with his position on the rationality of religious belief. Plantinga is arguing only that the believer needs no positive reason to support belief in God in order to be rational in believing in God. He acknowledges that good arguments for the existence of God might be both worth knowing for their own sake and efficacious in bringing a person to believe that there is a God.²³ The point is, for Plantinga, that the theist does not need to know them in order to be rational in believing that God exists.

²²Plantinga. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Chs. 11 and 12. His argument is a variation on the argument from design.

²³Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.73.

It might appear that Plantinga's claim that the community of believers will be able to start with examples of beliefs that are obviously properly basic should be understood in the same way that we understood the claim that we can all start with examples of perceptual beliefs that are obviously properly basic. In one sense it can and should be understood in this way. The believer has a different picture of the world, a picture which includes certain framework propositions that are taken for granted. Plantinga does not make this fact clear, but it is only if we think in terms of this idea that we can give any content to the fact that the believer would, according to Plantinga, make this immediate judgement. Given this way of looking at things, the judgement that there are properly basic theistic beliefs is as immediate as the judgement that there are properly basic perceptual beliefs.²⁴ Therefore, it might seem that, as Robbins writes, Plantinga's claim that belief in God is properly basic does amount to saying that, in certain circumstances, believers accept beliefs about God without question. The standards are, according to Robbins, community relative.²⁵ Alston, making a point similar to that of Robbins, has criticised Plantinga's position for being somewhat "*hardnosed*."²⁶ Alston means by this that Plantinga has given up one of the traditional aims of philosophy, that of, attempting to bring about agreement between the disputants. However, Plantinga's own position requires that he go beyond a community relative rationality. I will now show why it is that Plantinga's position calls for him to move beyond the community relative claim that believers can be rational in believing in God.

In giving details of the inductive procedure for arriving at examples of properly basic beliefs, I noted that according to Plantinga, believer and non-believer will probably fail to agree over whether these Christian beliefs are examples of properly basic beliefs, examples of beliefs that are justified just in virtue of, for example, having the appropriate sort of experience. Plantinga does, however, think that there is a question of truth here. This is very important in terms of his overall position. Plantinga claims that believers have the correct position concerning the innate capacity to form beliefs about

²⁴Gary Gutting notes that even within the community of believers there will be those who disagree that belief in God is properly basic. Gutting, Gary. *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1992. P.84.

²⁵Robbins, J. Wesley. "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14, No.4 (1983):247. Robbins writes that this is all that it amounts to but we will see reason to question that below.

²⁶Alston, W.P. "Plantinga's Epistemology of Religious Belief." P.301.

God and that those with opposing conditions are wrong. He is making a metaphysical claim about how we are constituted.²⁷ It is for this reason that the question of which beliefs might be properly basic is not just a question of which beliefs the community thinks that it has the right to take as properly basic. Rose Ann Christian rightly takes issue with Robbins' claim about the question of properly basic beliefs being community relative. She claims that Robbins has concentrated on only one part of Plantinga's discourse.²⁸ I want to put this to one side for the moment and will return to it at the end of the chapter, when we will see that this claim that Plantinga makes to know that we are so constituted that we have an innate disposition to form beliefs about God entails that the believer must give positive reasons to support this claim. First, I will show that Plantinga's position on properly basic beliefs is an inadequate version of Hick's position on this issue.

Since, according to Plantinga, being justified consists of not violating an epistemic duty or, in his new terminology, believing as one ought to, and not acquiring a defective noetic structure, the question of whether these beliefs can be properly basic for subject *s* is a question to do with whether subject *s* is violating a duty or acquiring a defective noetic structure in forming the belief in the conditions given. Let us take as an example the case of the believer in grave danger turning to God and asking for help and forming the belief that God can help in this situation. According to Plantinga, in the appropriate conditions this is an example of a properly basic belief. The subject is justified in believing that God can help just in virtue of having this experience. This, however, is not all. Subject *s* is justified in believing that God will help because she is believing as she ought to and because she does not acquire, in virtue of forming the belief, a defective noetic structure. The disagreement between atheist and theist will concern, first of all, the question whether she is believing as she ought to. The atheist will think that the believer needs reason to think that God will indeed help. Secondly, the atheist will think that the subject is acquiring, in virtue of forming this belief a defective noetic structure.

²⁷Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.78.

²⁸For Christian on Robbins see Christian, Rose Ann. "*Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness and Metaphysical Pluralism*," Religious Studies 28, Vol.4(1992):556.

The last sentence of the previous paragraph requires qualification. In chapter two I distinguished between two types of enquirers; an intellectually able individual and someone who lacked this same intellectual ability. If we consider Plantinga's position we will see that it differs as between these two types of believer. If we take a subject who lacks intellectual ability, then a sophisticated objector can not object that the subject has acquired a defective noetic structure. Subject *s* may lack any other beliefs that could possibly conflict with the belief that God is able to help. Subject *s* may be totally unaware of alternative explanations for belief in God, totally unaware of questions concerning whether we really do have the capacity given to us by God to form beliefs about him. Secondly, it is difficult to give content to subject *s* failing to believe as he ought to where the sense of ought is given in terms of what seems to us to be a good way to get at the truth. If subject *s* has, due to a lack of ability, no beliefs with which the belief that God will help might conflict, it seems difficult to say that they have done something wrong by failing to consider evidence. We might say that from the perspective of the atheist, the subject is not justified in believing that God will help, but the charge that they are irrational is not one that could be levelled against the subject. In this case, the sense of rational and irrational is not connected specifically with the notion of being justified.

The rest of the discussion is carried out in terms of a mature and intellectually able theist. Now we can consider again the disagreement over whether these beliefs can be, for an intellectually capable subject *s*, properly basic beliefs. We have seen that Anthony Flew replied to John Hick's defence of the rationality of religious belief, that there are at least two good reason or positive reasons to doubt whether these experiences are experiences of God. This point about these being positive reasons is important. I noted above that Plantinga's position is common sense position. This means that we can only introduce real doubts, doubts that we know are significant within the community of believers. The doubts that Flew gives are of this sort; first we might wonder whether religious experience is really a form of perception. Secondly, the fact of religious diversity seems to call these beliefs into question.

These are not, of course, the only intellectual challenges to belief in God. Perhaps subject *s* ought to have the belief that there is a lot of apparently undeserved suffering in the world and this would, *prima facie*, conflict with the belief that the Lord

is to be thanked and praised. Subject s ought to have the belief that the big bang theory and the theory of evolution account for the creation of the world and life on the planet and these would seem to conflict, *prima facie*, with the belief that God created all of this. Should subject s not also have the belief that there are alternative explanations for all of these experiences? Should subject s not have beliefs that call into question the notion that these beliefs are formed as the result of an innate response to God?

If, as most commentators do, we take examples of “perceptual” experiences of God, that is experiences in which the subject is aware of some aspect or activity of God, and the beliefs, which Alston refers to as manifestation beliefs, then, once again, it would seem that a mature and intellectually capable theist ought to be aware that there are a number of difficulties with these experiences. It would seem, again, that argument and evidence are related to these beliefs in some way, that the believer is not justified without further evidence in believing the propositions that result from these experiences.²⁹ Alston’s own work is a detailed defence of the possibility of experiencing God. Since these experiences differ phenomenologically, Alston has to argue on several fronts. For example, since these experiences sometimes include sensory content, he has to defend the claim that God can present Himself in this way. Since other experiences involve no sensory content but just the awareness of God as loving or powerful or compassionate, he has to defend the claim that God’s presence could be given in this way.³⁰

²⁹On perceptual experience and manifestation beliefs see Alston, William P. *Perceiving God. The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1991. P.1. Alston argues that phenomenologically it seems to the subjects that God is presented or given to their consciousness in generically the same way in which objects in the environment are given to consciousness. This awareness of the presence of God is characterised in terms of the difference to consciousness between imagining that God is present or thinking about God being present. See *ibid*. Pp.14-15.

³⁰Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.14-20 for examples of sensory and non-sensory experiences of God. See Pp.43-54 for his arguments concerning the perception of non-sensory qualities such as goodness and love. Alston is particularly interesting on P.47 where he attempts to argue that God could appear to a person as loving. Alston argues that if one has been in a loving relationship then one will know what it is like to be aware of a person’s love for oneself. His reasoning falls down since he is moving from an example in which one can perceive the subject who loves to an example in which there is no perception of a subject who loves. It may be the case, argues Alston, that one is aware of the presence of God through an infusion of love into the soul. See p.49. Finally Alston argues that an explanation for the experience of, for example, hearing God’s voice is that there are five interior senses of the soul corresponding to the five exterior senses. The interesting point about this from the perspective of doubting that the experience is an experience of God is that Alston posits this theory as a counter to the claim that the experience might be just the experience of feeling a certain way that is interpreted as an experience of God. On this issue see Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press. 1985. Proudfoot argues that feelings can only be specified in a context. There are not distinct feelings corresponding to the particular emotions. Rather we label

I noted in chapter three Alston's hyperbolic claim concerning Plantinga's essays on the epistemology of religious belief; that they represent a significant challenge to customary ways of thinking about belief in God. We find now that Plantinga's position seems to be subject to exactly the same questions that Flew raised concerning Hick's original statement of this position over thirty years previously. The question now becomes whether there is anything in Plantinga's position that allows him to overcome this challenge. Is there anything in his position that will allow him to claim that the believer can be immediately justified in believing in God, even though there are significant and positive reasons to doubt that there is a God. I will show that Plantinga's position is now, in a somewhat confused way, analogous to the statement of Hick in that the believer lives with the theoretical possibility that religious experience as a whole is delusory.³¹ I say that Plantinga is confused for two reasons. First, that he can not see that his concept of the basing relation is too narrow. Secondly, that, unlike Hick, Plantinga's account of the proper basicity of religious belief makes no reference to compelling religious experience. This absence means that he has nothing with which to counter the theoretical possibility of doubt.

Plantinga remains consistent in arguing that the believer needs no positive reason to believe that God exists. First he claims that in a large number of cases, the non-propositional warrant conferred upon the proposition in question is sufficient in itself to defeat objections to belief in God. By this he means that having the appropriate experience is sufficient to defeat any objection. Plantinga writes that,

When God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, the belief that God was speaking to him, I daresay, had more by way of warrant for him than would have been provided for its denial by an early Freudian who strolled by and proposed the thesis that belief in God is merely a matter of neurotic wish fulfilment.³²

The idea here is that the justification provided by the experience is sufficient in itself to defeat a Freudian defeater. The obvious question to ask here concerns how an intellectually capable theist would know this. How does Plantinga know this? One

the feelings according to the context of circumstances. Religious feelings are, he argues, general feelings in a religious context. See Ch.3.

³¹Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.226.

³²Plantinga, Alvin. "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3, No.3 (1986):312.

presumes that Plantinga has some understanding of Freudian theory and that he is aware that it does not provide convincing evidence that all religious belief is a case of neurotic wish fulfilment. Alternatively, as he himself notes, he is not an expert in these matters, and is relying on the fact that he has been told that the arguments are unsound.³³ It would seem that an intellectually capable theist would only be in a position to know this if they had considered these arguments or accepted on testimony that the arguments are not convincing. Testimony can be a valid form of evidence. A belief can also be properly basic if accepted on the basis of testimony. It would be subject to a set of conditions in the same way that the formation of a belief on the basis of experience is subject to conditions. For example, the testimony would have to come from an expert in the field, and one would have to trust that person. Alternatively one might formulate the evidence of the testimony into propositional evidence by reasoning that since the subject is an expert whom one trusts, then probably they are correct in their judgement. However, the belief that Freudian theory is not sufficient to defeat the non-propositional warrant conferred is arrived at, it is a fact that it is arrived at. When the belief that God is able to help is formed at time *t* it may, as Plantinga argues, be the case that the believer is justified immediately, and that they need not have an argument for the existence of God since the objections are not convincing, but this is only so against their background knowledge that these arguments are not convincing. We do not, as Quinn does, have to say that the belief that *p* at time *t* is based on these other beliefs. If we were to claim this, then we would have to give some content to a basing relation and this would be difficult since the basing relation is conceived of, minimally, in terms of believing both *A* and *B*. However, the rationality of belief in God is contingent upon a general system of beliefs, a picture of the world, one's entire perspective.³⁴

³³Plantinga. "*The Foundations of Theism*." P.312.

³⁴For the argument that Plantinga conceives of the basing relation narrowly see Quinn, Phillip. "*The Foundations of Theism*." P.483. Quinn argues that for an intellectually capable theist who had considered all of these reasons, the belief that *p* at time *t* would be based in a broad sense on the knowledge that these are not convincing arguments. Plantinga completely misses the point of Quinn's argument. He, Plantinga, ignores the claim by Quinn that there is some sense in which the belief that *p* at time *t* is based upon these background beliefs that the alternative explanations are not convincing. Plantinga. "*The Foundations of Theism*." Pp.306-312.

Secondly, according to Plantinga, the believer may engage in negative apologetics showing that, for example, an argument purporting to show that God does not exist is itself unsound. In this case writes Plantinga, the believer does not engage in positive apologetics providing a proof that, for example, the existence of God is compatible with the amount of evil in the world. Rather, the theist shows that the argument from evil is itself unsound. Finally, the theist need not even do this much; it may suffice to appeal to the fact that experts are equally divided over the question. The theist then sees that the argument does not decisively undermine belief in God.³⁵ At no stage does the believer have to produce a positive reason for thinking that there is a God. Once again, however, it is the case that the belief that p at time t is at least related to these other beliefs. Take Plantinga himself as an example. As a theist with some intellectual ability, he is aware of these arguments against the existence of God. When Plantinga forms the belief that p at time t, the fact that he is justified in believing that p is at least contingent upon his knowing that there are no sound arguments against the existence of God. He has himself contributed to overcoming these arguments. Once again there is at least a broad relationship between the particular belief and his background knowledge.

The claim that belief in God is properly basic is beginning to look strained and somewhat hollow. As Audi notes, even if the belief that God exists is not based upon evidence, is not based on any argument, belief in God remains evidentially dependent, where the sense of evidentially dependent is that the belief is contingent on all else that the believer knows.³⁶ Being justified in believing in God is at least a matter of being aware of the current state of arguments to do with the existence of God. One must at least have arguments against arguments. For example, a believer who is challenged to provide evidence would have to know something about Plantinga's position on this matter to know that they do not in fact need evidence.³⁷ The next question has to do with how all of this relates to not violating an epistemic duty in believing. Remaining with

³⁵Plantinga. "*The Foundations of Theism*." P.312.

³⁶Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." P.147.

³⁷Audi. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." Pp.156-162. Audi refers to this position as argumentalism. Its chief characteristic is that belief in God remains evidentially dependent. Phillips makes the same point that Plantinga's position looks strained. See Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.50.

the notion that the believer must only show that there are no good counter arguments to the existence of God and with the notion that epistemic justification is important for Plantinga, what is the theist to do when she finds that there are good counter arguments?

A person who does have the capacity to reason and to defeat potential defeaters for belief in God would, if they wished to be within their epistemic rights, have to engage in negative apologetics and if, as Plantinga thinks, believing as one ought to is important, then the believer ought to either give up belief in God or, given that justification comes in degrees, believe less strongly.³⁸ As Phillips notes, what would an intellectually capable theist do if she were to find an argument that she can not defeat?³⁹ Given Plantinga's assumption that it is right to argue about the existence of God, he would presumably allow that, in principle at least, Anthony Flew might come up with such a good argument that he, Alvin Plantinga, is unable to defeat . Whilst he would not necessarily have to give up his belief in God, since he might prefer to be, on his own terms, irrational, he would certainly, according to his own criteria for being justified, no longer be justified in believing in God. He would have a defective noetic structure. He would be in the position of believing that there is good reason to suppose that God does not exist whilst maintaining his belief in God. Plantinga is, I think, tacitly assuming that there never will be a good argument against the existence of God and, therefore, that the believer is not required to give up belief or believe less strongly whilst considering the evidence. Only in this way could the believer continue to believe as they ought to, that is, on the basis of faith.

Before considering whether we can show that the believer must become an evidentialist, I want to return to the point that I made in chapter one, that belief in God has to do with the difference that this belief makes in the life of the believer, with what belief in God means for the believer, and with the claim that it is the significance of this belief that provides the context within which argument and evidence are considered. Plantinga's epistemological position might be characterised as narrow, as lacking any perception of a subject's total experience. Plantinga concerns himself with particular

³⁸Phillips makes the point about giving up the belief but not the point about justification coming in degrees. Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. Pp. 49-52.

³⁹Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.51.

beliefs, particular experiences, particular counter arguments or defeaters for belief in God. He is, again tacitly, putting forward a position that is analogous to that of Hick; that there is always the theoretical possibility that believers are complete mistaken in their belief in God. In Hick's case, however, it was clear that the theoretical possibility that religious experience as a whole is delusory is mitigated in the life of the believer by the significance of belief in God. In Plantinga's work, any reference to what belief in God means to the believer is absent. The result is that belief in God appears, for Plantinga, to be sustained by countering argument and evidence or by the force of a particular experience. Secondly, we can see no context in which these beliefs are properly basic and we are left with no sense of why believers do so believe. I have already noted that Plantinga is engaged in negative apologetics. However, as a project of negative apologetics, there is no reason why Plantinga's position could not include an elucidation of the way in which God is a reality in the life of the believer. There would then be far more of a basis for showing that the theoretical possibility of doubt is overcome.

4.4 A Need For Evidence?

Until now we have allowed Plantinga to maintain that even an intellectually capable theist need not have positive reason to think that God exists or positive reason to think that her belief forming faculty is reliable in order to be rational in believing that God exists. With sufficient ingenuity, the believer could maintain that there are no compelling objections to religious belief. If we think again about the sorts of conditions that Plantinga has in mind for the formation of perceptual beliefs, then we see that there is a presupposition to do with perceptual capacity and what constitutes the proper working of this perceptual capacity.⁴⁰ For example, one would not be justified in believing that one sees a tree if one knew that one's eyesight was defective in some way. Alternatively, one would not be justified in believing that one hears a cuckoo if one were deaf. Just as we have to presuppose a certain theory of perception and an understanding of what constitutes a defect in the functioning of perceptual capacity, so Plantinga presupposes a certain theory about a capacity to form beliefs about God and

⁴⁰Christian." *Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness and Metaphysical Pluralism.*" P.563.

what constitutes the proper functioning of this capacity for belief formation.⁴¹ His work includes the metaphysical presupposition that we have an innate capacity, tendency, nisus or disposition to form beliefs about God. This is a natural capacity in the same sense that we have a natural capacity to form beliefs about the environment. There is a clear statement in his work that this innate disposition is connected with the conditions for believing. His metaphysical presupposition is given most clearly in his defence against the claim that just about any belief can be properly basic.⁴² He rejects the claim that just about any belief can be properly basic, writing that there is no natural disposition to form beliefs about, in the case of example he deals with, the Great Pumpkin. Here Plantinga specifically identifies the innate disposition as having to do with the conditions for the formation of the belief in question. Plantinga claims to know that we have this disposition and to know that others are mistaken in claiming analogous dispositions.⁴³

We have not shown that the believer needs an argument to support their belief that the faculty for producing beliefs about God is reliable. Could the believer not, as Plantinga suggests, engage only in negative apologetics, showing that this challenge is itself unsound or, minimally, take it that their own compelling experience provides sufficient justification in itself to defeat this challenge? If Plantinga were only setting out the position given above, then he could be read as arguing that from within his community belief in God is properly basic and that the believer needs no argument for the existence of God or for the metaphysical claim that there is an innate disposition to form beliefs about God. However, Plantinga does not accept that the question whether one is justified is a question relative to each community; he is making a metaphysical claim concerning the way that we are constituted. We are so constituted that we have a natural capacity to form beliefs about God and, as we know, by God, Plantinga has in mind, quite clearly, a very traditional conception of the Christian God. In saying that

⁴¹Christian." *Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness and Metaphysical Pluralism.*" P.563. See also Audi. *Direct Justification and Theistic Belief.* P.163. He notes the difficulty of determining the role of the concept of an innate disposition to believe in God in Plantinga's defence of the rationality of religious belief. Audi does not seem to grasp that the notion of innate disposition is an integral part of the elucidation of the conditions for a properly basic Christian belief.

⁴²Plantinga." *Reason and Belief in God.*" P.74.

⁴³Plantinga, Alvin. "Reason and Belief in God." P.78. On this issue see Christian, Rose Ann. "*Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness, and Metaphysical Pluralism.*" *Religious Studies* 28, vol.4 (1992):.567.

Plantinga will not allow that justification is community relative I mean that he claims to know that there is this capacity and, further to know that members of other communities are not believing as they ought to when they form different beliefs. Although he uses the ridiculous example of forming beliefs about the Great Pumpkin, he says that he knows that there is no natural disposition to form beliefs about the Great Pumpkin whilst he knows that there is a disposition to form beliefs about God.⁴⁴ The logic of his position is that if asked about the formation of beliefs about, for example, Allah, or beliefs about Brahman, then he would have to maintain that he knows that there is no natural disposition to form beliefs about Allah or about Brahman whilst he knows that there is a disposition to form beliefs about God.

As I have written, the fact that a belief is properly basic within a picture or way of looking at things does not mean that these other beliefs constitute evidence for the belief in question. Plantinga, might maintain that the same is true for any number of the beliefs that are a part of the Christian picture, but when an intellectually capable theist makes the claim to know that there is a natural disposition to form beliefs about God and no natural disposition to form beliefs about Allah, then something has to be done to show that he knows that there is an innate disposition to form beliefs about God but no natural disposition to form beliefs about Allah. Although Plantinga has not made this claim, citing only the case of the Great Pumpkin, it is not unreasonable to extend his case to cover examples of alternative religious beliefs. One would expect Plantinga to offer serious cases in order to test his claim that belief in God can be properly basic and his claim to know that the his metaphysical position is the correct one. Therefore, whilst commentators argue that if confronted with the challenge of the diversity of religious belief, Plantinga must give positive reason to think that the Christian belief forming mechanism is reliable, and by virtue of doing this become an evidentialist in this minimal sense, we do not necessarily have to pose this question in order to raise a question about whether Plantinga must give positive reason to think that there is an innate disposition. He has, by implication, suggested that others are wrong in their beliefs and

⁴⁴Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." P.78. Once again, Plantinga makes use of an example that will not be taken seriously.

that he is right in his belief to do with an innate disposition to form beliefs about God. How does he know this?⁴⁵

Given Plantinga's position on evidentialism, if he has to give positive reason to show that he knows that his position is the right one, propositional evidence from which it follows that there is a belief forming mechanism for beliefs about God and no other belief forming mechanisms, then there is a sense in which he has become an evidentialist. Implicitly at least, he must appeal to other beliefs within this picture in order to justify his claim to know that there is a Christian belief forming mechanism that functions reliably. He might for example appeal to his claim that the failure to realise this capacity is due to the fact that the faculty is suppressed by sin and extend this to cover the case of the problem of religious diversity. Those forming different beliefs are sinners. Since he has made the claim to know that there is such a faculty and to know that those who believe there to be other faculties are wrong, he would, have to give positive reason to think that the faculty as conceived by this community, or at least Plantinga's contingent within this community, is reliable. My conclusion here is that the argument that belief in God can be properly basic is not tenable, a claim that can be derived from Plantinga's own position on the proper basicity of belief in God. Minimally, an intellectually capable theist is going to have to appeal to at least one other belief; the belief that those who do not form the appropriate beliefs, or who deny that there is such a disposition are in a state of sin. This would amount, as Christian writes, to "*fideistic posturing*."⁴⁶

The wider concern is, of course, the question of the relations between atheist and theist. Plantinga claims to know that we have an innate disposition to form beliefs about God and that if this disposition were not suppressed by sin, then all would believe in God. Plantinga's position, however, does not give any content to the way in which he would reply to an atheist who denies that we have this innate disposition. What will happen in the event that the atheist claims to know that we do not have this innate

⁴⁵For two critics who raise the diversity challenge see Christian, Rose Ann. "*Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness, Metaphysical Pluralism*." Pp.569-570 and Basinger. "*Plantinga, Pluralism, Religious Belief*." Pp.78-79.

⁴⁶Christian. "*Plantinga, Pluralism, Religious Belief*." P.572.

disposition?⁴⁷ Once again Plantinga's only recourse would appear to be to judge that the atheist is in a state of sin. In doing so he is giving a reason to believe that his own position is the correct one. This is not, of course, a reason that the atheist will accept but it is a reason nonetheless. It constitutes propositional evidence for his belief that he is right and the atheist is wrong. It would seem that the result of this claim will be continued argument concerning who is, in fact right, and who is wrong. In the final analysis, then, Plantinga's own position entails that he provide positive reason to believe that his own position is the right one.

Plantinga, therefore, is now in the position that Flew claimed for the believer; that the onus of proof is upon the theist.⁴⁸ Plantinga has claimed too much. Rationality and justification do not guarantee truth. One may be rational in believing and even justified in believing and yet be wrong. If Plantinga had claimed only that the believer is rational in believing in God, and maintained this position, then he would not be in the position of having to show that he knows that he is in the right over the issue of the belief forming disposition. However, he has claimed more than this; he has claimed to know that he is in the right and that others are wrong. In chapter one I wrote that one must give content to the question of establishing that there is a God. I presupposed an enquirer interested in the question whether or not there is a God. We can now see that Plantinga has argued for a position in which he would have to reply to the demand for evidence with evidence that his own position is the right one. Far from changing the parameters of the debate, Plantinga has remained within the parameters of that debate. Since he gives no other content to the way in which he would establish that his own position is the right one, and since he seems to value argue and evidence, I am inferring that he would conceive of establishing that his own position is the right one in terms of arguing for it.

4.5 Conclusion

Plantinga's epistemological position does not, as we have seen, decisively change the parameters of the debate concerning the existence of God. It amounts to the claim that belief in God is innocent until proven guilty together with the tacit

⁴⁷Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.42.

⁴⁸Flew. *The Presumption of Atheism*. London:Elek/Pemberton. 1976. P.20.

assumption that there never will be a good argument against the existence of God together with the claim that he knows that his position is the right one. In chapter one I followed John E. Smith arguing that unless the debate is to be an empty one we must posit an enquirer interested in the question whether or not there is a God. Plantinga does not seem to be thinking of the enquiry in this way. Alternatively, if he is then he needs to do much more to reply to that challenge. As his position stands at the moment, believer and enquirer are separated by a gap constituted by their different estimations of the force of objections to belief in God. Plantinga's only reply, given his position, is that the unbeliever is in a state of sin.

In the first section of chapter three I referred to the claim of W.W. Bartley that the result of offering a standard in terms of which one can claim that one's beliefs are justified will be that one will then be forced to defend that claim against subsequent objections. Plantinga's work, as we have seen, bears out this contention concerning an appeal to an epistemic authority, in this case religious experience. On an initial reading, Plantinga's chosen standard is the experience of the believer. At a deeper level he is drawing upon Calvin's metaphysics concerning the way in which we are constituted. It is, for Plantinga, a truth that we have an innate tendency to form beliefs about God. If required to defend this he would have to appeal to a different authority, perhaps the Bible. Finally, when it is clear that there is no agreement between the opposing parties on this issue, he is left only with the claim that if those who can not see this are in a state of sin.

In the next chapter we will see further consequences of failing to defend belief in God in terms that are appropriate to the nature of belief in God. The fact that Plantinga has compared Christian beliefs with more mundane perceptual beliefs leads critics to pursue this analogy and to conceive of God as an object of experience in the same way that, for example, a tree is an object of experience. Having covered this final problem with Plantinga's work, I will be in a position to return to my argument concerned with aesthetics in order to show, finally, that the only answer to a subject who wishes to know that there is a God, is that the subject must come to see that there is a God. The divide between enquirer and believer is constituted by the fact that the latter has, whilst the former has not, encountered God. If one really wants to know whether or not there is a God, then one must at least have a significant interest in the question.

CHAPTER FIVE

Encountering God

5.1 Introduction

In chapter one I wrote that the most appropriate reply that the believer can make if asked how they know that God exists is that God's reality is given in their lives. It is not to take the direction of either giving evidence to show that they know or of claiming that belief in God is properly basic. I also wrote that the most appropriate method of bringing about agreement that there is a God is to persuade or bring the enquirer to see that there is a God. Just as in aesthetics there is the notion that the most convincing, and indeed, the only proof that the work has the quality in question is experiential, so in the case of questions about the reality of God, the most convincing, and, again, the only proof is experiential.

We have already seen that there are problems with Plantinga's claim that belief in God is properly basic. The most obvious is that his argument leads him into the position of showing that he knows that the Christian view of things, or his understanding of the Christian view of things, is the right one. In this chapter, I will show the further consequences of comparing belief in God with our more mundane perceptual beliefs. I do this within the context of critically considering further aspects of the discussion whether belief in God can be properly basic. Further consideration provides the context within which we can consider the fundamental mistake of this entire way of looking at things. I show that philosophers have little or no understanding of the nature of belief in God or of the way in which God's reality is given. Having demonstrated this, I return to the point made in the opening chapter that God's reality is given in the lives of believers and that the only way to come to know God is for God to become a reality in one's life. I suggest that we are dealing here with a process of persuasion and pointing out rather than with a process of reasoning from premises to a conclusion. One must see the need for God before God can become a reality in one's life and seeing the need for God is not a matter of reasoning from premises to a conclusion. One must come to see differently and this will involve a process of change through experience. It is experience that changes and experience through which one comes to find God.

5.2 Experience and Evidence

Plantinga's work on belief in God as properly basic has led to further comparisons between our mundane perceptual experience and religious experience. The reader will remember that a properly basic belief exhibits a set of characteristics of certain relations in virtue of which one is justified in believing the proposition in question. For example, subject *s* is immediately justified in believing that she sees a tree if that belief is formed on the basis of the appropriate experience, if there is no reason to doubt that her cognitive faculties are in proper working order, and broadly, in the absence of any other reason to doubt the veridicality of the experience. In terms of mundane perceptual beliefs commentators, among whom we can count Robert Audi, suggest other conditions must, in principle at least, be capable of being fulfilled. Most notably, in the case of perceptual beliefs, the belief ought to be the sort of belief that is capable of being checked and the sort of belief would be formed by any other subject similarly placed.¹ These further conditions are connected with the likelihood of the belief in question being true. I will show in the following sections that these conditions, which broadly speaking have to do with the possibility of the belief being confirmed, are important for religious beliefs but that it is a mistake to take them over in an unqualified manner. To do so is to conceive of God as an object of experience analogous to a tree or some other mundane object.

Other critics have pointed out that belief in God is not analogous to the belief that, for example, one sees a tree, since these beliefs about God are not capable of being checked in the same way that, for example, the belief of subject *s* that she sees a tree is capable of being checked. We can locate the fundamental mistake of philosophers engaged in discussion about belief in God in Grigg's estimation of Plantinga's position. Richard Grigg argues that since Plantinga has offered "mundane" examples of properly basic beliefs as paradigmatic examples of properly basic beliefs, we are justified in asking whether religious belief is sufficiently similar to these beliefs. He identifies what he perceives to be three major differences between the mundane beliefs offered by Plantinga and the Christian beliefs and writes that since there are significant differences it cannot be argued that belief in God is properly basic by

¹See for example Audi, Robert. "Direct Justification and Theistic Belief." In Audi, Robert and Wainwright, William J., eds. *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment. New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1986. Pp.148-150.

reference to these more “ordinary beliefs.”² The fundamental mistake is that of comparing belief in God with these more mundane examples. Plantinga may have invited such a comparison but there is no reason to continue with the error. Rather than comparing religious beliefs with mundane beliefs and evaluating the former unfavourably, one should question the premise that religious beliefs ought to be compared with the more mundane beliefs. I have been saying that there is something strange about comparing belief in God with the belief that one sees a tree or with the belief that person p is in pain. A different direction is needed and the reason for this can be brought by considering the consequences of assimilating belief in God to our more mundane beliefs.

Of the three differences, identified by Grigg, between the mundane and religious beliefs, the two of immediate concern are that perceptual and other beliefs are capable of independent confirmation and that there is a certain universality about them. By independent confirmation he means that we can trust a mundane experience because it is nearly always confirmed by some other experiences we have. Secondly, by universality he means that it is a feature of these other experiences that we would expect a second subject placed in similar circumstances to form the appropriate belief. Since independent confirmation may take not only the form of the experience being confirmed by other experiences of subject s but also by the experience of another subject placed in similar conditions, these two conditions are not mutually exclusive. In this section I will show the consequences of unquestioningly assuming that if belief in God is to be properly basic, then the experiences that lead to the formation of the belief must be capable of being checked in the same way that we check our mundane perceptual experiences.

The condition that these beliefs be capable of being confirmed is susceptible of two different applications. The background to the first challenge is the verification principle or the public verification criteria for making an existential claim or a claim about what there is. In this case the challenge is that since these conditions are not fulfilled there is good reason to doubt the veridicality of the experience and the truth of the belief grounded in it. The second is concerned with the credulity principle; that this

²Grigg, Richard. “*Theism and Proper Basicity: A Response to Plantinga*,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14 (1983):125-126.

principle can only apply if we know how to doubt whether these experiences are veridical. In this case, the challenge is that since the relevant conditions do not obtain, believers have no way of knowing whether or not the experience is veridical and, therefore, no way of determining the truth of the belief in question. The first challenge seems most applicable to confirming the belief for another subject and is fundamentally misconceived; the second seems most appropriate for confirming the belief in the life of the believer and, whilst not fundamentally misconceived, it presupposes a very narrow understanding of the conditions in which a belief might be confirmed.³

I want to set the first question to do with whether a second person might verify the experience of a person who claims to have had an encounter with God within a larger framework by asking why a person would be interested in discovering whether or not a particular religious experience was or was not veridical. Secondly, I will make clear the sorts of religious experiences to which this criticism is applicable. C.B. Martin assumes that any enquiry into the veridicality of a religious experience would have to do with an interest, on the part of the subject, whether or not there is a God.⁴ This is a mistake. He should have written that the fundamental problem with the philosophical perspective on verifying religious experience is that it is not perspective that has to do with any real interest in the question. When these philosophers make up their cases and give their examples, they show a complete disregard for the way in which God's reality is given in the lives of believers. Martin needed to argue that the whole perspective is fundamentally flawed, making the question of God's reality into the sort of question that would be at home in a scientific attitude. Philosophers conceive of confirming that there is a God in terms of tests that will verify that the experience was indeed veridical.

The sorts of religious experiences that these philosophers have in mind are the perceptual religious experiences already discussed; experiences in which the subject seems to hear the voice of God or cases in which the subject seems to be aware of God's love. In this case, the presupposition is that any claim about an experience of an "object" relative to a subject must be capable, in principle of being confirmed. It is the fundamental assumption, that God is an "object" that is wrong, together with the notion

³Alston, William P. *Perceiving God*. P.210.

⁴Martin. *Belief in God*. P.80.

of carrying out tests appropriate to mundane perceptual experience.⁵ In the cases of the experiences of the vast majority of believers the sorts of checks and tests that they have in mind are not apposite, being of use only for perceptual religious experiences.

I start with Gary Gutting's objection to Plantinga's claim that belief in God can be properly basic. Gutting writes,

One way to show that there is no good reason to think that a person's epistemic situation provides a privileged access to the truth of a given proposition is to show that there are others in the same epistemic situation who do not have such access.⁶

Gutting gives the following example; if a certain microscope technician claims to see that a cell sample is cancerous and another technician equally well trained fails to see this, then the first technician needs to offer further reasons beyond seeing that the cell is cancerous in support of the claim that the cell is cancerous. Gutting writes,

The thought is simply that the failure of an epistemic situation to provide privileged access to the truth of a proposition for some people raises doubts as to whether it provides access for anyone.⁷

Therefore, since there are many intelligent people, termed by Gutting "epistemic peers," who do not agree that there is a God, believers must justify their belief that there is indeed a God. Gutting's fundamental mistake, in terms of Plantinga's thesis, is the assumption that these epistemic peers are in the same epistemic situation. Within the logic of Plantinga's thesis, this is not the case. Believers are in a fundamentally different situation. The epistemic peers are or would be, according to Plantinga, still in a state in which their disposition to believe in God is suppressed or overlaid by sin. There is, then, in Plantinga's argument, an explanation for why it is not obvious to all that there is a God.

The more fundamental problem with this approach is the presupposition that the question of God's reality is much like a question concerning whether a certain cell is cancerous. This is a part of philosophical presupposition that finding out that there is

⁵I am aware that there is a strong tradition against making God into an object, whose existence is capable of being verified or falsified through tests. See Hepburn, Ronald. *Christianity and Paradox. Critical Studies in Twentieth Century Theology*. London: Watts. 1966. Chs. 3 and 4. I will return to this below.

⁶Gutting, Gary. *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1982. P.90.

⁷Gutting. *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*. P.90.

a God is like discovering whether or not something is the case. Finding out whether there is a God is like confirming that a certain cell is cancerous or finding out that there is a God is like confirming that a subject really sees a tree. Gutting, like a number of other philosophers, is not aware of the presuppositions that he brings with him. This is further evidenced by the piece of blue paper argument, an argument still given a place in recent literature on whether there can be evidence for the existence of God.⁸ According to Martin, we know what sorts of experiences can not be tested or have no need of tests; psychological claims such as "I feel pain," or claims about seeming to see an object. Therefore, if experiences of God cannot be checked then they are more like psychological claims and not about an external reality. For Martin there are only two types of claims; psychological uncheckable and existential checkable claims.⁹

The idea behind the piece of blue paper challenge to religious experience is that we can not just say of something that it is "out there", that it is an object relative to us. Checks and tests are important. Other things are relevant to the claim to have perceived something. Martin says that,

The presence of a piece of blue paper is not to be read off from my experience as of a piece of blue paper.¹⁰

There seems to be something wrong with this. Certainly in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world this is exactly how we know that there is a piece of blue paper.¹¹ Since we can give clear content to the idea that the presence of a piece of blue paper is to be read off from an experience of a piece of blue paper, Martin must, unless he has made a mistake, be getting at something else. He is concerned with the fact that it is the possibility of checking that is important. The possibility of these various sorts of checks and tests becomes important when we are in doubt concerning whether an experience is an experience of an object rather than say an hallucination. He is

⁸See Yandell, Keith E. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1994. Ch.10. Taber, John A. "The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 19 (1986).

⁹Martin. *Religious Belief*. Pp.74-75. For a very lucid statement of Martin's position see Conway. "Mavrodes, Martin, *Religious Experience*." P.167.

¹⁰Martin. *Religious Belief*. P.87.

¹¹Plantinga suggests that in the case of perceptual experience having the appropriate type of experience may allow one to say that one knows that one sees a tree. Plantinga. *Reason and Belief in God*. P.85.

making a point about occasions when there may be doubt about whether something is an object relative to me. At these times, there are a variety of tests and checks that will establish when something is an object relative to me and it is the possibility of these checks and tests that is important. It is these checks and tests that establish that there is something out there, that there is an object relative to me.¹² In terms of the conditions in which one would not be justified in believing that p without further evidence, we would not be justified if the experience were of the sort that could not in principle be tested in this way. McCleod writes, that our concern is not that properly basic beliefs are always confirmed but that, in general, when one does try to confirm them, they are confirmed.¹³ The point of confirmation is that if we could not confirm it, in principle, there would be reason to doubt the veridicality of the experience and since there is reason to doubt subject s would not be rational in taking it as basic. It must in principle be confirmable. Martin says,

Think now of a man who claims to see a piece of blue paper, and when we complain that we cannot he replies "Oh, it isn't the sort of thing that can be photographed, touched or seen by others, but all the same it is out there before me." Are we to think that he has come upon some special sort of object that is nevertheless "out there" as are desks and tables and the rest of the furniture of the world?¹⁴

Martin's point is analogous to that of Gutting. There are, he thinks, checks and tests and procedures for determining whether one really perceived what one seemed to perceive. He writes that, "... *ontological reference is something to be earned.*"¹⁵ Martin's claim is that sometimes we are mistaken about whether something is really an object relative to us. Sometimes aspect experiences are taken as object experiences. In these cases we only seem to experience an object; in fact we do not and one way in which we can come to know this is through public checking. If no one else can see what we claim to see, then we have established that in this case there is nothing out there. This

¹²On this point see Mavrodes, George I. *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1970. P.76.

¹³McCleod, Mark. "Can Belief in God Be Confirmed?" *Religious Studies* 24 (1988):312.

¹⁴Martin. *Religious Belief*. P.88.

¹⁵Martin. *Religious Belief*. P.88.

is of course far too simple but I will return to that later. This may not be the most common function of agreement but in this case it is the role that it fulfills.¹⁶

It is clear enough that there is something wrong with the claim that since religious experiences, and, specifically in this case, perceptual religious experiences or experiences in which the subject seems to be aware of the presence of God, can not be publicly confirmed, then it is not rational to believe that they are experiences of God. First, this claim is premised on the notion that any belief that makes an existential claim must be capable of public confirmation. Martin's presupposition that God is an object of experience capable of being investigated is as misguided as Gutting's argument that since we can not all confirm that God exists there is the need for evidence to support belief in God. Mavrodes says that,

To demand that the corroboration of every experience should be equally as easy as substantiating the existence of a piece of paper is simply to exhibit a foolish disregard for the relevant facts.¹⁷

This is certainly true; it is true even in the case of perceptual experience in which there are quite clearly experiences that are not susceptible of being confirmed by others.¹⁸ The fundamental mistake is to conceive of God as an object given in experience and subject to the methods of empirical investigation.

Conway shows an appreciation of the fact that given the nature of God it is inherently absurd to demand that religious experiences be capable of being confirmed in the same manner as mundane perceptual experiences, but argues that since there is no way to check that these experiences really are experiences of God, one can not take them as such. The notion that there is no way to confirm them rests on the presupposition that the only sorts of confirmation that there could be are those that apply to perceptual experiences. Conway uses what he takes to be a more precise analogy but in this case too the religious believer is put at an immediate disadvantage by the nature of the analogy. Conway deliberately picks an example which most people would immediately understand as an example of an hallucinatory experience; the

¹⁶See Taber. *"The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience."* P.49 He claims that agreement does not normally establish objective validity per se.

¹⁷Mavrodes, George I. *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*. New York: Random House. 1970. P.79.

¹⁸McCleod. *"Can Belief in God Be Confirmed?"* P.312. Mavrodes. *Belief in God*. P.79.

reason for this is clear. I am using Conway's example rather than giving my own to make clear that this is an example that immediately prejudices the case for the reality of God.

Suppose that while walking down the street one quite afternoon, I see before me an elfin sort of man, no more than two feet tall. I think it odd that no one else appears to notice such an unusual creature, but he speaks and tells me that he can appear to only one mortal at a time and even then only once every ten thousand years or so ... Distrusting my eyes I reach out to touch him but he assures me that he is quite intangible even to one person to whom he appears. Even though I am embarrassed at the stares of passers by, I converse with the little man for some two hours, during which time he explains that the (sic he) does not know much about *this* world, but that he knows very much about an earth beyond the farthest star ... and a life I have lived before ... Finally he tells me that his allotted time is up and he must go, mentioning before he disappears that it is his nature to leave no trace whatever since his existence is never completely within our space-time framework.¹⁹

The point for Conway is that the complete absence of checks and tests means that the only evidence for the experience being veridical is the experience itself. No one else sees the little man; there is no physical evidence of his presence; one can not check out the information that was given. None of this is evidence against the experience being veridical because this is, he writes, just what would be expected given the nature of his little friend. He then writes,

In such cases, should we adopt the position that because nothing can count for or against our experience being veridical, we should accept it as veridical? To do so would seem to open the way for any sort of lunacy whatever, provided only that the lunatic experience is carefully enough guarded so that it is clear that we *could not expect* any checks or tests to be relevant.²⁰

The conclusion that he draws is that whilst there may very well be veridical experiences of God, these are truths that we must, if we want to remain rational, go without. It is not reasonable to take the experience as veridical if it can not be checked since sometimes

¹⁹Conway, David. "Mavrodes, Martin and the Verification of Religious Experience," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 2 (1971):167-168.

²⁰Conway, David. Mavrodes, Martin and the Verification of Religious Experience. *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 2 No3:156-171, (Fall 1971), P.168.

we are mistaken and we need to know when we are mistaken.²¹ He thus substantiates the claim of William James that there are those who are “*so in love*” with the scientific method of verification that they have ceased to care for the truth.²²

There are two points that mean that there is really no substance to his challenge. The first has to do with the initial probability that we would attach to the possibility of this sort of experience. He has deliberately chosen an example that is completely implausible so that the idea of there being checks and tests never gets off the ground. He knows that in this case we would not even consider the probability that there are such things as little green men. We do not make the judgement immediately that those who have a religious experience are deluded because the experiences are common. Within our culture and across cultures there are so many people who have had the experiences that we would at least give them initial credence. We would not, as in the case of the person who has claimed to see a little green man, immediately begin to wonder about their sanity.

There is another reason why the argument to do with the little green man has no substance and it is that Conway claims that all of these things are to be expected given the nature of the little green man but this idea is incoherent. There is a sense in which nothing is expected because we know nothing about the nature of the little green man. When we think about a Christian experience we can make assumptions about what is to be expected given the nature of God. We have approximately two thousand years of theological reasoning that has given us expectations about the nature of God. The concept of God is well established in what is still broadly speaking a Christian culture. The same is simply not true of what would be an experience of little green men. We

²¹Conway. “*Mavrodes, Martin, and the Verification of Religious Experience.*” Pp.171, 164 and 169 respectively.

²²James, William. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York London and Bombay: Longmans Green and Co. 1899. P.21. Martin notes that the believer will object that experiences of God should not be made to conform to the checking procedures relevant to physical objects but writes, “but what sort of checks are there then, so that we are left with more than the mere experiences whose existence even the atheist need not deny?” He dismisses the criteria that I offer below but gives no reason for doing so. His position is deeply rooted in the presupposition that the checking procedures for the veridicality of perceptual experiences are the only appropriate checking procedures. Martin. *Religious Belief*. Pp.88 and 93. William Rowe is also of the opinion that there are no checks and tests for whether a religious experience is veridical. He too thinks that religious experience compares, in this matter, unfavourably with perceptual experiences. Rowe, William. “*Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity,*” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982):90-91. Conway writes that the only model we have for checking is perceptual experience. Conway. “*Mavrodes, Martin, Religious Experience.*” P.169.

have no established ideas about the behaviour and nature of little green men. This means that there is a degree of incoherence in the claim concerning what is to be expected. We, that is those who are supposed to verify the experience, have no expectations concerning the behaviour of little green men. To use this as an example and to draw an analogy with Christian experience is a mistake.

The sorts of experiences that Plantinga discusses are not perceptual religious experiences, at least not experiences in which the subjects are directly aware of the presence of God or of some aspect or activity of God. They are, rather, experiences of feeling guilty or of feeling thankful and in such situations the believer forms the appropriate belief. How would this argument, that if an experience is to be taken as an experience of something existing independently of the subject then the experience must be capable of being confirmed, apply to the sorts of experiences that Plantinga considers? These are not, susceptible, even in principle of being subject to the sorts of checks and tests that these philosophers have in mind.²³ One possibility is a return to the theology and falsification debate of the 1960's. This, however, would be a retrograde step. John Hick showed successfully that belief in God is capable of being either verified or falsified in the afterlife.²⁴ Secondly, and as Wisdom notes, belief in God is not an experimental issue.²⁵

Rather than seeking a solution to this problem, we should, rather, question the premise that these sorts of experiences should be subject to testing and checking procedures. The fundamental mistake is to conceive of God as an object relative to a subject. God is not, for the subject, an object in the same way that a piece of blue paper or a tree are objects relative to a subject. It is a mistake to think in this way. God is not a reality relative to a subject but a reality in the lives of those who believe in Him. It is in coming to see that there is a God that God's reality is given and those who demand that there should be checks and tests before one can claim to know that God exists or

²³Mark McCleod argues that the general belief that God created everything is capable of being confirmed for the believer. McCleod, Mark. "Can Belief in God Be Confirmed?" P.320-321.

²⁴For the debate see Flew, Anthony and MacIntyre, Alasdair, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. London: SCM Press. 1955. Ch.6. For Hick on eschatological verification see for example Hick, John. "Theology and Verification." In Hick, John, ed. *The Existence of God*. London: Macmillan. 1964. Pp.252-274.

²⁵Wisdom, John. *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1953. Pp.149-151.

even justifiably believe that God exists, should have it pointed out to them that they are fundamentally mistaken in their conception of God's reality.

We have, therefore, seen two points. The first has to do with public confirmability of the experiences and has not broken with the verification and falsification arguments of the 1960's. The second is that the experience can not justify the belief since there is no way to tell whether or not the experience is veridical. We have also seen that these questions can be related to a variety of types of religious experience. Broadly, I have made a distinction between perceptual and non-perceptual religious experiences.

5.3 Encountering God

In this section I will show first that believers themselves are concerned about their "perceptual religious experiences" and that there are criteria in accordance with which the community itself can determine which are veridical experiences of God. The veridicality is assessed in terms of the effects. I will then ask about the more mundane experiences and suggest that God's reality is confirmed in the more mundane experiences in the same way. In chapter one we saw that, according to Sibley, critics perceive that a work has a certain quality and that, having perceived that it does, all that they can do is say why the work does have that quality. They point to those features of the work that are responsible for their judgement. The believer is, I am saying, in an analagous position. All that they can do is point to those features of their experience, in this case the experience of having encountered God, that are responsible for their belief in God. These features have to do with what the encounter with God has meant in their lives, with the difference that encountering God has made. Citing the features of their experience should not be understood as providing reasons, in the logical sense of a true statement of fact from which it is reasonable to make an inference, to believe that God exists. The believer is simply showing how they know that there is a God and they know, not because they have reasons from which they can infer that God exists, but because, as it seem to them, they have encountered God. Like the non-aesthetic qualities in a work of art, these features of their experience are capable of being taken, not as the result of having encountered God, but as the result of mistakenly believing that they have encountered God. Atheists will take them in one way; the believer in another. Having considered these "features" of encountering God, I will continue the

analogy, arguing that to see which way the features do count, one must come to see that there is a God. The atheist must come to encounter God and having encountered God, she will see which way to take the features cited. I thus establish continuity with the main point of the thesis that it is the experience of the believer that is of primary importance in knowing God.

William Rowe also argues that there are no checks and tests for determining whether perceptual religious experiences are veridical.²⁶ Kvanvig points out that there is clearly something wrong with the claim that there is no way to assess whether religious experiences are veridical.²⁷ It would seem that we do know how to discover whether a particular experience is veridical. There are various psychological and sociological theories we might use and argue that if the experience can not be accounted for in terms of these theories we have reason to think it veridical.²⁸ Rowe, however, does not seem to have this kind of test in mind. He is thinking in terms of the idea that one would need to know something about the abnormal bodily or mental states of the believer and that since an abnormal bodily or mental state is something of a prerequisite for the sorts of experiences he is considering, experiences in which the subject seems to experience God, it seems to Rowe that no statement about such a state can serve to show that the experience is delusory. As both Kvanvig and Losin point out, believers themselves may claim to have such an idea from within their tradition.²⁹ Just as we have, in the common sense attitude of the everyday life world, a clear idea of the conditions for a veridical experience and therefore a standard against which to judge when experiences are not veridical, so believers have an idea of what constitutes a veridical experience of God and, therefore, a standard against which to judge when an experience is not veridical.

I concur with Alston who argues that it is completely unreasonable to expect religious experience to conform to the conditions that we apply to our normal perceptual

²⁶Rowe, William. "Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 13 (1982).

²⁷Kvanvig, Jonathon L. "Credulity," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 16, No.2 (1984):102-103.

²⁸Keith Yandell does in fact argue in this way. See Yandell, Keith E. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1994. Ch.10 esp. Pp.270-271.

²⁹Kvanvig. "Credulity." P.103. Losin, Peter. "Experience of God and the Principle of Credulity: A Reply to Rowe," Faith and Philosophy 4 (1987):64-65.

experience.³⁰ He writes that it is “... *unthinking parochialism or chauvinism, or epistemic imperialism* ...” to demand that religious experience be submitted to checks and tests suited for ordinary perceptual experience.³¹ The basis of the argument is that the tests for the reliability of sensory experience are tests formed on the basis of the nature of that experience and these are inappropriate for religious experience which is something completely different. To argue otherwise is simply to behave in an imperialistic manner.³² Taber says this of the philosophical claim that religious experience ought to be capable of being verified that,

... it takes religion to be something that it is not-viz., as having cognitive content in a *scientific* sense-thereby making demands on it that it cannot possibly live up to ... religious utterances do have cognitive content; nevertheless, they have a quite different kind than scientific sentences, due to the fact that they occur in a context of faith, a fundamentally different ... epistemological situation than science.³³

The main problem is that this debate about verifying religious experiences places religious experience within an alien context. It takes “ordinary” perceptual experience as a model and judges religious experience against this model. This does not mean that believers take all experiences to be veridical experiences of God. Phillips was wrong in claiming that the exemplars of the faith do not stop to ask whether the experience was a veridical experience.

The exemplars of the faith do consider whether the experiences that they have are genuine experiences of God or whether they are experiences induced through their own exertions or, for example, from the devil. There are criteria for determining when an experience is a veridical experience but the criteria are not such that they will be accepted by philosophers who seem to want God to appear so that they can confirm his existence. This is a problem for the philosophers who have failed to understand the

³⁰Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.217-219.

³¹Alston. *Perceiving God*. P.220 Brackets mine.

³²He also discusses predictive efficacy but this is covered by discussion of the public nature of tests. They can be public in the case of sensory experience because sensory experience does exhibit regularities which religious experience does not.

³³Taber, John A. “*The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience*,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 19 (1986):.43. Unlike those scholars mentioned above Taber is not so “in love” with the ideal of “scientific verification” that he can see no alternative. It is wrong, he writes, to judge religious experiences by standards appropriate for most of us experience most of the time. See *ibid*. P.55.

nature of religious experience. The criteria offered from within the community for determining the veridicality of the particular experiences are such that they may be employed for determining both whether a particular perceptual experience is a veridical experience of God and also whether the sorts of experiences that Plantinga considers are experiences of the reality of God. In considering these criteria, and developing the point about these criteria, we will see the most appropriate sort of reply to a subject who asks the believer how they know that God exists. The answer is that they know that God exists because God is a reality in their lives. It is in terms of what belief in God means to the believer that God's reality is given.

I wrote in chapter one of this thesis that there is something strange about the idea of replying to an enquiry about how one knows that God exists in terms of abstract philosophical argument about the grounds for knowledge. If a believer were asked how she knows that God exists, she would more naturally reply in terms of the sorts of criteria that I am about to elucidate. Philosophers may make the point that this is not the sort of question that they are asking. Their question is, by its nature, abstract and theoretical. It has to do with showing that the claim to know that God exists is a proper claim to knowledge. Within the context of theistic picture or theistic way of looking at things, the sort of answer that I will give is, I think, the appropriate sort of answer. To say that one knows that God exists because God is a reality in one's life is, within this way of looking at things, to make a proper claim to knowledge. It may not be a proper claim to knowledge from the perspective of the enquiring philosopher but as enquiring philosophers, some enquiring philosophers at least, seem to think that God's reality is given in the way that the reality of a piece of blue paper is given, there is good reason not to be too concerned with what the philosophers have to say on this matter.

To characterise, in a single locution, the means by which the subject of a particular religious experience is assured that the experience is of God, this assurance comes in terms of the effects of the experience for or upon the subject in question.³⁴ St., Teresa shows a concern with whether her experiences are or are not veridical. There is a question for her whether these experiences might not have been brought about by her own strenuous endeavours or whether they might have been sent by the

³⁴Alston. *Perceiving God*. Pp.210-205. McCleod, Mark. "Can Belief in God Be Confirmed?" *Religious Studies* 24 (1988):317-320.

devil. Her answer concerning how one can be sure whether these experiences are veridical is that the effects of a veridical experience are very different from a non-veridical experience, an experience that is, perhaps an auditory hallucination or an experience sent by the devil. One feels differently if the experience is a veridical experience and the experience itself bears certain “fruits” in the life of the subject; trust in God, patience, simplicity, interior peace and charity. As Losin rightly notes, these criteria are developed against the background of assuming that there are veridical experiences which have positive effects. It is in this way that believers know which experiences are not genuine. It is also the case that believers may need to appeal to other beliefs that they have in order to develop the criteria.³⁵ We might more appropriately think of the development of criteria in the same way that Holloway conceives of the development of the criteria according to which works of art are judged. That is, that it is upon the basis of seeing those features that blemish or improve a work of art that we make aesthetic judgements. Over a period of time, these criteria become catalogued into standards for judgement.³⁶

These criteria do not establish that there is a God and the belief that there is God is not based upon them. Rather belief in God is presupposed in the criteria or in the questioning whether a particular experience is or is not veridical. From within the community of faith, there is a framework of beliefs against which asking these questions has its sense. The same is true for our mundane perceptual experience. The criteria are, in the respective cases, different but this is what we should expect. To answer Grigg's point that one's mundane beliefs are confirmed by further experiences that one has, the case is analogous for these sorts of religious experience but the further “confirmation” is different. It is given in terms of the effects in the life of the believer.

This idea, that the genuine experience can be determined in terms of the fruits in the life of the subject and the more general point that God's reality is given in an encounter with God which changes the life of the believer is susceptible of greater application. In terms of the general point, this is the way in which God's reality is given

³⁵Losin, Peter. “*Experience of God and the Principle of Credulity*,” Faith and Philosophy 4, (1987):65-67.

³⁶Holloway, John. “*Distinctive Features in Criticism of the Arts*,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 23 (1949):176.

in the life of the believer and the way in which one should consider these experiences. It is a misunderstanding of the way in which God's reality is given to ask about God in the way in which one would ask about the existence of an object and it would be a mistake for believers to defend their belief in God in an analagous manner. The appropriate defence when asked how they know that God exists is to point to the changes in their own lives and what God's reality means for them. As Taber writes, the right question to ask about these experiences is not whether we should accept them but why we do accept them, and, the reason that we do accept them has to do with the qualities of those who have had these experiences.³⁷

Just as there are reasons why we do accept the veridicality of certain experiences, so there are reasons why we would reject the claims of some individuals to have had veridical religious experiences. Once again these have to do, to a large degree, with the qualities displayed by the subject. The first type of challenge has to do with reasons that one might have to suppose that there are problems with the description of the experience and, therefore, that the experience might not have been an experience of what it seemed to have been an experience of.³⁸ That is that the experience was not veridical. Franks Davis says that it is a fundamental principle of rationality that in the absence of good grounds for believing otherwise one should take a person's description of their experience as revealing the way that things appeared to them at the time of having the experience.³⁹ Certainly we can agree that, with a few exceptions those who have the experience are in the best position to say what the world looks like from within that kind of experience. They are the experts on the phenomenology of the experience, on its content. But this does not mean that they are experts on whether the apparent content of the experience correctly depicts the way that things are.⁴⁰

³⁷Taber. "The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience." P.56.

³⁸Franks Davis says that there are three main sorts of challenges to religious belief. Description related challenges, subject related challenges and object related challenges. These all overlap and have to do with reasons to doubt that the experience is what it seemed to be an experience of. Franks Davis, Caroline. *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1989. Ch.5.

³⁹ Franks Davis. *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. P.115.

⁴⁰Yandell. *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. P.164.

Franks Davis cites a number of reasons to doubt that a person has had a veridical religious experience; the one that I am concerned with has to do with our expectations about the behaviour of the individual.⁴¹ This criterion is more readily applicable to all types of religious experience, both perceptual and non-perceptual. In both cases we have certain expectations about the way in which people who have encountered God will act. If they fail to act in accordance with our expectations then there is reason to doubt that they have encountered God. Reports of religious experiences arouse certain expectations about the behaviour of those who have them. If someone claims to have had a religious experience one expects them to behave in a certain way. One expects their outlook on life to change, perhaps their attitude to others to change. One would expect their attitudes to death to change, that they would have greater peace of mind, that they would make an attempt to overcome addictions such as alcoholism or drug dependency. It is the desire to change rather than the immediate efficacy of the effort that is important. If, for example, the person continues to be selfish, worldly oriented, concerned with material things, if they continue to lie to cheat and to steal, then one would have reason to doubt that they are telling the truth about their experience. If they made no effort at all to overcome their dependency on drugs or alcohol then one would doubt that they were telling the truth about their religious experience. Franks Davis takes these factors to contribute to the evidential force of religious experience for the existence of God. I do not. It does not follow from changed behaviour that there is a God or that it is probable that there is a God. In chapter one, I detailed Sibley's position on the fact that the non-aesthetic features of a work of art do not count only one way. The case is analogous for the effects of a particular experience in the life of the believer. There are a variety of possible interpretations and one can take them as the result of having encountered God or as simply the result of mistakenly believing that one has encountered God. These changes do not count only one way and the way in which they do count is contingent upon the perspective of the subject considering them. For an atheist such as Flew, they will be capable of being explained in terms of the psychological effect of believing that one has encountered God. For someone within the community of faith they will be interpreted in terms of a genuine encounter with God. These criteria should be used

⁴¹See Davis. *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. Pp.115-118.

in giving an answer to the way in which God's reality is given. The non-believer may not agree that this is the way in which one can show that one knows that God exists but this is, I suspect, because they think of God as an object relative to the subject and the question whether there is really a God as one to be decided in the same way that one decides whether this particular object really exists.

In chapter one I gave Sibley's account of how a person with an aesthetic interest might come to know that a work has a certain quality. If one has an aesthetic interest then one will want to see that the work has the quality in question. Therefore, it followed that the task of the critic is to bring a person to see for themselves that the work has the quality in question. It would be a mistake to ask for reasons to believe that the work has the quality since one could not, in this way be brought to perceive that quality. Similarly, if a person has some interest in the question whether or not there is a God, then the task of the believer is to bring that person to see that God exists. It is to bring them to a position of finding God as a reality in their lives. To come to know that God exists one must find God as a reality in one's life and, this process can be usefully elucidated, using Sibley's concept of coming to see that a work has a particular aesthetic quality. We might call the evidentialist approach scientific in a loose sense in that it conceives of religious experience as something to be tested. In this sense one would have the hypothesis that there is a God to be experienced or that a subject may have had an experience of God. The test is that relevant to ordinary perceptual experience. If the experience were veridical then others ought to be able to confirm it through having a similar experience. The problem with this is that,

... religious experience, if we are to be convinced of its validity at all, must at least to some extent undermine our confidence in our ordinary way of looking at things. A willingness to take religious experience seriously is necessarily accompanied by a readiness to doubt one's taken-for-granted view of reality, eventually to renounce wholesale one's old way of thinking and being and adopt a new one. But this means that religious experience can be meaningfully evaluated only in the context of faith ...⁴²

The attempt to evaluate religious experience whilst remaining committed to one's current way of looking at the world is suited only to falsifying it.

⁴²Taber. "The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience." P.55.

The potential for a different direction is given in what Grigg perceives to be one of the major differences between mundane and religious beliefs. This difference is that there is a certain amount of bias or want in the formation of religious belief. People want to believe in God; they do not want to believe in trees.⁴³ Mark McCleod replies to Grigg that this is not in fact a disanalogy. There are many ordinary beliefs which involve unconscious bias.⁴⁴ Grigg responds, quite rightly, that if it is a fact that there is bias in many of our basic beliefs, then this fact would entail, in a number of cases at least, that in these conditions the belief in question is not properly basic for subject s. Conscious or unconscious bias would be one condition that would militate against the belief being properly basic for subject s.⁴⁵

In the case of belief in God, however, wanting to believe in God is surely at the very heart of coming to see that there is a God and continuing to believe in God. Once again we see that Plantinga's comparison of belief in God with mundane belief leads critics in the wrong direction. To write that wanting to believe in God counts against the rationality of that belief is to completely misunderstand, or to show absolutely no regard for, the nature of belief in God. The fact of wanting to believe in God or of needing to believe in God is, I would say, essential to coming to know God. Surely the very point is that, unlike a lot of our more ordinary beliefs, a significant interest in the question of whether or not there is a God is a prerequisite for coming to know God. Coming to know that there is a God can not be a matter of a disinterested enquiry into whether or not an object exists. However, the consequence of comparing belief in God with these more ordinary beliefs is that finding out that there is a God is thought of as analogous to a disinterested enquiry into whether or not an object exists.

I will now consider the activity of bringing a person to see that God exists. Flew argued that the onus of proof lies with the theist to show that the concept is coherent and that there is evidence sufficient to warrant belief in the existence of God? In the model that I am advocating, the notion that the onus is wholly on the theist would be wrong. It is up to the person who wishes to know that God exists to do something about

⁴³Grigg, Richard. "Theism and Proper Basicity: A Response to Plantinga," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14 (1983):125-126.

⁴⁴McCleod. "The Analogy Argument for the Proper Basicity of Belief in God." Pp.4-6.

⁴⁵Grigg. "Belief in God." P.391.

coming to know that God exists. If it is the case that one wants to know something then one usually does something about finding out whether or not it is true. If I am really interested in knowing then I may try to find out for myself rather than waiting for someone to prove it to me. A necessary condition of being brought to see that God exists is that the enquirer be in the attitude of what Pearce calls musement. Although hard to characterise exactly, this attitude involves or is a state in which one is ready to see that things might be other than they seem. It is a willingness to allow one's mind to consider other possibilities. Alternatively the attitude of musement might be defined negatively as an activity that is not reasoning to a conclusion. It is willingness to reflect without considering that upon which one reflects as evidence for the existence of God. It is to allow oneself to wonder and to question.⁴⁶ Unless this fundamental requirement is fulfilled the possibility of the success of bringing a person to see is precluded. One can not continue to think in terms of the believer presenting evidence for the existence of God.

There are a number of things that can be done to bring someone to see that God exists or to bring them to a more empathetic understanding and these are analogous to bringing someone to see that a work of art has a certain quality. This way of bringing a person to see that there is a God can be thought of in terms of calling upon an interrelated pattern of beliefs to bring about a different way of seeing things. That is, God's reality is given not at the end of a chain of reasoning but in a picture or pattern. The believer is calling upon diverse beliefs in order to present a picture.⁴⁷ As Mavrodes writes, if a person is interested in but doubtful of some experience, then one way to remove doubt is to bring them to "see as one sees." In the case of doubt concerning the veridicality of a mundane perceptual experience this bringing to see can be understood literally in terms of placing the subject in conditions similar to one's own. In the case of bringing a person to see that God exists, clearly enough, the process is not identical. It is not a case of the physical location of the subject in relation to an object. However, the spatial metaphor has some use in elucidating the procedure. The believer wants the

⁴⁶See also Pierce, Charles Saunders. *Collected Papers. Vol VI. Scientific Metaphysics*. Edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1935. Pp.311-318.

⁴⁷Audi, Robert. *The Structure of Justification*. USA: Cambridge University Press. 1993. P.139. These points are made by Audi in articulating the nature of justifying one's beliefs in terms of the way in which they cohere with one's beliefs.

interested party to move from one way of seeing things to another way of seeing things.⁴⁸

The first parallel with Sibley's case of the critic bringing a person to see that a work has a particular quality has to do with the behaviour of the critic. Sibley wrote , that one of the things that is important in bringing a person to see that a work has a certain quality is the behaviour of the critic.⁴⁹ Analogously, the behaviour of the believer will have a part to play in bringing a person to see that there is a God. Taber says that, rather than asking whether we should accept the various religious experiences that people report, we would be better to ask why we often do. He writes that often we do accept their reports because of the type of person that they are. We are impressed by them. They seem to have qualities that are different, positive qualities that bring about our admiration.⁵⁰ It is these qualities that point towards the reality of God in their lives and it is these qualities that will or may impress a person asking about the reality of God. One can see the importance of this by imagining a case in which the behaviour of the believer is not appropriate, in which God's reality seems to have made no difference in their lives. In this case their behaviour, their demeanour and outlook will not be efficacious in bringing a person to see that there may be a God who makes a difference in the life of those who believe in Him.

Not all believers are in a state such that the quality of their lives will be indicative of the reality of God in their lives. The fact that this is the case does not, however, have any implications for the validity of the procedure. To be more precise, the fact that not all believers live exemplary lives that testify to the reality of God in their lives, does not invalidate the claim that God's reality can be seen in the life of a believer. Believers are as human as everyone else and do not always live up to an ideal. Perhaps, however, we can think in terms of presenting an interested inquirer with the ideal, with examples of the exemplars of the faith, with classic expressions of religious experience. The behaviour of the vast majority of Christians may not always be such that it testifies to the reality of God in their lives but there are examples of believers whose lives do testify

⁴⁸Mavrodes. *Belief in God*. P.83.

⁴⁹Sibley, Frank. "Aesthetic Concepts." *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959):444.

⁵⁰Taber. "The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience." P.56.

in this way to the reality of God in their lives. There is no sense in which this provides evidence for the existence of God. One can not formulate an inductive argument on the basis of the lives of the exemplars of the faith to the reality of God. It is more a question of being impressed with their lives.⁵¹ The process is not a matter of offering reasons from which God's existence can be inferred but of trying to get that person to grasp a whole picture or a total way of seeing things. The right sort of attitude is one in which one considers not whether one should accept that persons have had veridical religious experiences but what it is, for example, about the exemplars of the faith that impresses us.⁵²

There are other ways in which one might try to bring a person to see as one sees. The first three ways that Sibley gave are most usefully taken together. They are that one may simply point out either the aesthetic feature of the work, the non-aesthetic feature of the work or link the aesthetic with the non-aesthetic.⁵³ We saw that in the case of the work of art both parties can see the non-aesthetic features of the work of art but the critic can see something more. The same is the case for the non-believer who wishes to come to believe. Mavrodes gives two ways in which a person might be brought to see that God exists and these can be thought of as analogous to Sibley's first three ways to bring a person to see that a work has a particular quality. One may start with the non-religious features of the world, or with what seem to the non-believer to be the non-religious features of the world. This would involve developing in the interested inquirer a sense of the need for God. One need not mention God at all. One could simply point to those common features of human experience that are either problematic or wonderful or puzzling. In such a way one might bring a person to see that there is a God.

Alternatively one might point out those features of a situation or experience which they see as pointing towards God's reality and link the features to the existence of God. One might, for example point, to the wonder of creation and ask whether this does not point to a creator or to the pervasive sense of meaninglessness and ask

⁵¹On the significance of the behaviour of the believer for giving prima facie credence to their claims to have had a religious experience see also Franks Davis. *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. Pp.115-118.

⁵²Taber. *The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience*. Pp.56-57.

⁵³Sibley. "Aesthetic Concept." Pp.442-443.

whether this fact does not indicate a lack in the lives of those who despair.⁵⁴ An example will help here that is useful for understanding both procedures. Having argued that the traditional proofs for the existence of God have been shown not to work, the philosopher J.N. Findlay writes that nonetheless these arguments cause him to ask questions such as why there is something rather than nothing and whether the universe has not in fact been designed by a creator. This is despite the fact that, in the case of the question why there is something rather than nothing, “... *logic has taught me to look at such a question with the gravest suspicion.*” He continues, “*That anything should exist at all does seem to me a matter for the deepest awe.*” Likewise, although the argument from design, as an argument, does not, in his opinion, work, it brings about a certain attitude in the person who gives it careful consideration. There is wonder and awe at the world in which we live.⁵⁵

Peter Berger points to what he calls prototypical human gestures as signals of transcendence. He calls these prototypical human gestures the middle ground, a midway point between the religious and the secular so that is a good reason to use them.⁵⁶ By signals of transcendence he means,

... phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our "natural reality" but that appear to point beyond that reality. In other words I am not using transcendence here in a technical philosophical sense but literally, as the transcending of the normal, everyday world ...⁵⁷

We may understand these gestures not as reasons from which one can infer the existence of God but as features of existence that might lead a person to encounter God. One is not giving reasons to infer to a conclusion. One cannot do this since the reasons do not count only one way. Using Sibley's insight concerning aesthetics, one will only see which way these “non-religious features” count once one has come to adopt the religious picture of the world. It is more a matter of presenting and re-

⁵⁴Mavrodes. *Belief in God*. Pp.82-85.

⁵⁵Smart, J.J.C. “The Existence of God.” In Flew, Anthony and MacIntyre, Alasdair, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. London: SCM Press. 1955. Pp.46-47. Smart writes that Kant felt the same way about the argument from design. Although he rejected the argument as an argument Kant felt that it induced a certain attitude in believers strengthening their belief in God. See *ibid.* P.45.

⁵⁶Berger, Peter L. *A Rumour of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. England: Penguin Books Ltd. 1969 P.94.

⁵⁷Berger. *A Rumour of Angels*. P.70.

presenting features of existence in order to bring someone to see that God does exist. It is a question of bringing about a change in perception. This is analogous to pointing out the non aesthetic features of a work of art in order to bring someone to see that it has a certain aesthetic feature.

The first of Berger's five prototypical gestures that signal transcendence is the notion of order, and the point is that when we give a reassurance of order that transcends the immediately given we make a statement about reality as such, we affirm that there is order even if we do not know the exact nature of that order. Without order there is the nightmare of chaos and terror. This would be the final reality. If we were to understand this as a reason for believing that there is a God, we would see that the same reason, the need to believe in an ultimate order, can count in a completely different direction. Without the final justification of order there is simply the human and the meaning that we have is the meaning that we make. The illusion is gone and God is dead. Now is the time for humans to affirm the reality of their existence, their aloneness, the fact that any order that there is in the world is order that we bring ourselves. The desire for an ultimate order is, from the perspective of the atheist, a superstition that is best left behind us. Perhaps we do find it frightening to think that we are here, that this is it, that we must make our own meaning but that is no reason to believe in God. It is simply the cause in those too feeble minded to affirm their own finite existence and to get on with making something of themselves.

Furthermore, the atheist will have good reason for denying that there is order. This is one of the reasons for denying that the world shows evidence of design by a benevolent creator. R.D Laing considers what we take to be normal. Normal for the human population is killing each other in numbers that defy belief.⁵⁸ The notion of some overall order, that everything is alright really, seems hardly credible. The reply of the theist will be that if the human race was functioning properly, in accordance with God's plan, these sorts of things would not occur. Laing seems to indicate that if we changed ourselves to be servants of the divine, then we would transcend the pseudo sanity that is our current normality and achieve a new normalcy, a true sanity.⁵⁹ We would

⁵⁸Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. 1972. P.24.

⁵⁹Laing. *The Politics of Experience*. Pp.118-119.

transcend a state in which we think of ourselves as normal and sane when we live in a world with almost unbelievable atrocities perpetrated by humans on humans.

This prototypical gesture of order does not provide a reason to believe in God. If one thinks in this way one will become ensnared in endless debates about the problem of evil and free will. It will not provide an inductive argument for believing in God. What one needs is to see that God does exist. This does not provide a reason to believe. The best that a theist can do is to point to it as a feature that is responsible in part for her belief and hope that by pointing to it she will bring about a change in the interested party.⁶⁰ Berger's other four signals of transcendence are the phenomenon of play since in play the time structure is altered and the present becomes eternity; there is a timelessness about play. Next is the phenomenon of hope; then the need for some ultimate punishment for the excessive acts of evil perpetrated by some individuals and finally, humour.

Sibley's third procedure of pointing to the aesthetic feature is more problematic. The reason for this is clear from Berger's position on signs of transcendence. He does not appeal directly to religious experience because, writes, it is from the perspective of the non-believer, too far outside of their own perspective. He does not use religious experience because religious experience is on the margins of society and, he argues, one cannot expect someone to agree to beliefs based upon experiences that are outside the normal everyday world to the extent that religious experiences are outside what is taken to be normal.⁶¹ Thus, there would be a danger in appealing directly to religious experience or to what the believer takes to be an obvious example of the reality of God. However, if a subject were already in the position of needing to find God, then perhaps simply pointing to God as an answer to that need would have the desired effect. This is not an issue over which one can generalise. Each case will be different in the same way that each case would be different for a critic bringing a person to see that a work has a particular quality.

The other ways in which a person might be brought to see that a work of art has a particular quality are the use of simile and metaphor; the use of contrasts and

⁶⁰I am not going to discuss his four other gestures because the point already made would just be repeated. One of his other gestures is the phenomenon of play and this is dealt with in detail below.

⁶¹Sibley. "*Aesthetic Concepts*." Pp.443-444.

comparisons with other works of art; and, finally, repetition and reiteration, bringing a person back again and again to the same work, going over the same features until they see what it is that the critic wishes them to see.⁶² We may also contrast and compare asking the person to imagine for example a world with no religious meaning, how empty it would be. These methods also have their place in the process of bringing a person to see that there is a God. These ways should not be thought of as mutually exclusive. The process of repetition and reiteration may be necessary in engaging in one or more of the first three ways of bringing a person to see that there is a God. It may not suffice to point out certain features of the world on just one occasion. Perhaps this process will have to be repeated in conjunction with other ways.

Mavrodes refers to the idea of being provided with an extensive conceptual framework within which one can make sense of one's life and likens this to learning of a new language. The theologian provides one with a kind of key.

... if some part of it makes contact with some element in our experience so that each one illuminates and makes sense of the other, then we will take a new interest in that theology. If it goes beyond this, if it serves to light up broad ranges of our experience so that we begin to see a kind of sense in our lives, then, perhaps, we will be more than interested ... if the terms and doctrines provide a clue as to how to respond, and if, as we try that response, we find our experience continuing to make sense then we are likely to say that the key was a true one and that we also have heard God speaking to us.⁶³

This is a perfect illustration of both of the things that I have been talking about. First, that the test has to do with finding significance in one's own life and secondly that in these terms one can come to find God as a reality in one's life. In chapter one we noted that works of art, but not only works of art, can deliver important truths about our lives. One may conceive of this notion of bringing a person to see that there is a God, more comprehensively, in terms of presenting the enquirer with a picture of the world. This picture may be presented in parts, in the ways suggested above or, more fully, in terms of a story presented by the believer, perhaps about their own lives. The example of Tolstoy from chapter one gives content to the idea of presenting a way of looking at

⁶²Sibley. *"Aesthetic Concepts."* Pp.443-445.

⁶³Mavrodes. *Belief in God.* P.87.

things. In Tolstoy's story of the process by which he came to see that there is a God, we have a story that has the power to capture the imagination of the listener.

The important thing is that the experience of coming to see that God exists consists of being brought to have an experience in Gadamer's sense of an experience. The believer wants, in talking to the interested party to bring them to have an experience in which the enquirer is caught up in the presentation of the believer in such a way that they are no longer a subject listening to a story or to an expression of what it is for God to be a reality in one's life. Rather the enquirer finds himself confronted with a truth, recognising something essential or important. One wants the enquirer to be "caught up" in the story that is told or in the presentation that is given so that they recognise or see what they did not see before.⁶⁴

Mavrodes writes that if some part of the presentation connects with a part of the experience of the subject and illumines that experience, and if the subject comes, on this basis, to see some sense in their life or perhaps some meaning and if their experience continues to make sense, then that person will have seen the key to be a true one. The particulars begin to bring about a new way of seeing and as the new way of seeing emerges so the particulars begin to be seen differently and again there is a movement back to a whole way of seeing differently.⁶⁵ Sibley is aware that people may find something puzzling about the way in which someone is brought to see that a work of art has certain features.⁶⁶ One of the reasons for this is that the perception is not "normal". That is the perception that something is balanced or graceful goes beyond what can be established by simply seeing the picture. This something more is troubling but, according to Sibley, we are all familiar with the fact that people do perceive these qualities and not just in the context of aesthetics. Even though we can not explain just how persons come to see these qualities, they are nonetheless qualities perceived by

⁶⁴Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination. Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Cross Road. 1991. Pp.113-114. For the idea of a work of art as an event of meaning, an experience in which one comes to see a truth, an experience in which one encounters and participates See Gadamer, Hans Georg. *Truth and Method*. Second Revised Edition Translated by Joel Wiensheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Sheed and Ward. 1989. Pp.101-117.

⁶⁵Mavrodes. *Belief in God*. P.87.

⁶⁶Sibley, Frank. "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic." *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965)142.

most people in the context of everyday life.⁶⁷ William James has the following to say about the process of conversion.

...if you ask psychology just *how* the excitement shifts in a man's mental system, and *why* aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central, psychology has to reply that although she can give a general description of what happens, she is unable in a given case to account accurately for all the given forces at work. Neither an outside observer nor the Subject who undergoes the process can explain fully how particular experiences are able to change one's centre of energy so decisively, or why they so often have to bide their hour to do so. We have a thought, or we perform an act, repeatedly, but on a certain day the real meaning of the thought peels through us for the first time, or the act has suddenly turned into a moral impossibility.⁶⁸

Therefore, having given content to the notion of bringing a person to see that there is a God, a process in which God becomes a reality in the life of the subject, I appeal to William James' insight that we can not say just how this occurs but we know that it does occur. From the point of view of bringing a person to see that God exists, the concern of the believer is with the efficacy of the procedure and not an analysis of the exact process by which this happens.

Wisdom articulates this kind of presentation and reflection in terms of the presenting of features which cooperate in favour of what the theist wishes to be said. The premises are not presented in a chain of reasoning; they are more like the legs of a chair. They offer support and the idea is to induce a change of attitude rather than to force a conclusion.⁶⁹ His articulation of this type of reasoning is not exactly lucid but he seems to be presenting the idea that one needs to induce a change in the person who considers the facts and argument does not induce that change. Argument compels assent and what we want is not assent to a proposition but a different way of seeing things. The process that he outlines can be thought of in terms of coherence and justification. In justifying a belief in terms of the way that it coheres with one's other beliefs one is not engaging in a chain of reasoning but drawing upon diverse information

⁶⁷Sibley. *"Aesthetic Concepts."* P.438.

⁶⁸James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* P.201.

⁶⁹Wisdom. *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis.* P.157.

or, in terms of the believer's picture of the world, drawing upon the diverse beliefs and experiences within that picture.

Although he did not develop the idea in any detail, there is a point in Wisdom's work on coming to see that God exists that was not present in Sibley's aesthetic theory. This is the point that bringing a person to see that God exists may involve removing bad unconscious reasoning on the part of the subject who is coming to see that God exists. This might, for example, take the form of pointing out to that person that their own aversion to Christian belief is grounded in a prejudice. William James argues that if a hypothesis is dead for a person then it is probably dead not because that person has cogent reasons for believing the hypothesis to be false but because that person has already, and in accordance with their willing nature, rejected the hypothesis as dead.⁷⁰ Alternatively, removing bad reasoning may consist of showing that there can be no reasons to believe in God. I raise these points because it has a bearing on the role of reason in bringing to see. Reasoning does have a function. Although one may reason with the person in order to bring them to see that God exists, one will not be involved in offering reasons in the logical sense from which one can infer that God exists. I mean by this that as well as trying to bring them to see that God exists one may have to reason with that person in order to remove bad reasoning. One may be involved in what Wisdom refers to as "reasoning to remove bad unconscious reasoning."⁷¹ As an example, we can say that the process of reasoning may involve pointing out just how bad are the objections to religious experience as grounds for belief in God.

Sibley wrote that the enterprise of the critic is successful if the enquirer ends up seeing what they did not see before. Analogously, the enterprise of the believer is successful if the subject encounters God. Smith has the following to say of encounter.

The reason behind the choice of this term for the description of experience is that it best expresses the fact that in experience we find something already there, we come up against something, we confront persons, objects, events and we do so with the sense that we undergo or receive whatever it is that we meet without any sense of being responsible for having produced it. Encounter, however, is minimal; in encounter we do not pass beyond the surface or "face" of the object. Encounter is the beginning of the experience but not its end. Every item

⁷⁰James. *The Will To Believe*. Pp.8-9.

⁷¹Wisdom. *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*. P.162.

encountered has a “depth” as well as a surface, and the penetration of this depth requires various interactions between ourselves and what we encounter.⁷²

Encountering God consists of coming up against God and responding to God; the encounter involves a response on the part of the person who has the encounter. This is not a definition of religious experience; that is, I am not saying that encountering God is a sufficient condition for identifying Christian experience but that a part of the workable idea of a Christian experience is that it involves encounter with God and is interpreted by the subject in these terms. To come to see that there is a God is to be near God, “to practice the presence of God.”⁷³

Finally, there is an issue that was raised by Sibley’s work that has a bearing on the relationship between evidence and religious beliefs. Sibley said that aesthetic judgements may be governed negatively such that one could know that a work did not have a certain aesthetic quality. One would not require aesthetic perception to make such a judgement. However, making use of Sibley’s point about the fact that aesthetic judgements may be governed negatively, Plantinga’s position can not account for this fact since he conceives of justification just in terms of believing as one ought to and not acquiring, in virtue of so believing, a defective noetic structure and only of particular beliefs. If, however, we have a broader conception of how we might judge the beliefs of a community as a whole, there is the possibility of agreement between believer and non-believer, at least concerning those religious experiences and beliefs that are probably not veridical.

Can there be general reasons, in the logical sense, that might be shared by both believer and non-believer for thinking that a complete picture or complete way of seeing things is false? We expect certain things of a religious picture and if that picture does not conform to our expectations we reject it. We would say that the experience is not veridical. Hick gives the example of Jim Jones who induced his disciples to commit suicide. It is not as clear that his other examples will be compelling for the non-believer. For example, he gives the cases of witchcraft, astrology and living one’s life in terms of

⁷²Smith, John E. *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1968. P.13.

⁷³Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. P.234.

being influenced by extra-terrestrial beings.⁷⁴ From the perspective of the non-believer, the Christian way of looking at things might not appear to be very different from the examples cited by Hick. Hick's fundamental presupposition is that we would reject these experiences on the grounds that they are "out of tune" with the rest of what we know, that these experiences conflict with our other beliefs and are, for that reason, not tenable. Believer and non-believer will not, in terms of Christianity, be able to agree on this. For many non-believers Christianity will itself conflict with the rest of what we know. A sufficient number of peripheral beliefs will have become problematic so that the whole picture looks dubious.

Therefore, in terms of agreement between believer and non-believer concerning reasons to reject a whole way of looking at things, we are left with reasons to do with our expectations concerning these pictures. We expect them to increase meaningfulness in life, to bring about positive changes in the life of those who participate them, to make people more not less moral. This might appear to call into question the major world religions, adherence to which has in a number of cases led to very undesirable consequences. The difference may be constituted by the fact that the ideal is one that would lead to benefits for humankind even if this ideal is not always realised. In the case of religions that we would all reject as in toto delusory, the ideal is not, in the first place, a positive one. However, even this remains problematic. It presupposes certain values and I am not sure how we would justify these values. It presupposes that we ought to judge an entire world picture in terms positive values and it certainly seems possible for someone to deny that this is an appropriate standard. The answer to the problem lies in what the adherents to the picture would claim for themselves. The particular ways of seeing should be judged in accordance with their own aims.

5.4 Confirmation

Although, given what I have written previously concerning the mistake of thinking of God's reality as a hypothesis to be tested, I would reject the language of test and theory and hypothesis, I am going to make use of some ideas from Caroline Frank's Davis concerning testing the religious hypothesis. Whilst rejecting the language

⁷⁴Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*. P.217.

of test and theory, we can extract a notion of the way in which God's reality is given both for the believer and for a person coming to see that there is a God and an understanding of the actual import of alternative explanations for belief in God both for the believer and the person coming to see that there is a God. Having considered in this thesis attempts to justify belief in God and having made clear that belief in God involves, most fundamentally, encounter with God and that, nonetheless, the question of alternative explanations remains, for an intellectually capable theist, a serious question, I will now attempt to reconcile the fundamental significance of encountering God through faith with the fact that there are alternative explanations for these experiences.

Critics argue, and Mavrodes notes, that this process of bringing a person to see might simply be a process of bringing a person into the delusory state of the believer.⁷⁵ From the fact that we are talking about believers having a particular picture of the world, a particular way of looking at things, it does not follow that there is no wrong or right of the matter. We can conceive of this picture in terms of an attitude in the same way that we have a common sense attitude in the everyday life world. Findlay discusses the religious attitude which he conceives of in terms of feelings and actions that are either appropriate or inappropriate and, he argues, that one can make sense of saying that an attitude is either justified or not justified.⁷⁶ Attitudes are appropriate or justified only in the appropriate setting. Attitudes are responses to objects or can be responses to objects and attitudes presume characters in their objects. The attitude is appropriate if the object has that character and the appropriateness of the attitude is strengthened if there is evidence that the object does have that character. The religious attitude is, for example, only appropriate if the object is perceived to be superior.⁷⁷

Similarly, the religious attitude is either inappropriate or appropriate. Despite the protestations of D.Z. Phillips that religious belief is groundless, that it is a serious mistake to conceive of belief in God as involving cognitive content, and that it makes

⁷⁵Mavrodes. *Belief in God*. P.85.

⁷⁶Findlay, J.N. "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?" In Flew, Anthony and MacIntyre, Alasdair, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. London: SCM Press Ltd. 1955. P.50.

⁷⁷Ronald Hepburn makes the same point about encountering God. See Hepburn. *Christianity and Paradox*. Pp.34-35.

no sense to ask whether or not there is a God, there remains a wrong and a right here. Phillips himself seems to suggest that there is a question of truth. In rejecting the notion that religious belief is cognitive and arguing that the statement that there is a God is not in the indicative but rather an expression of faith, Phillips still seems to allow that there is a question of truth. It is just that it is a mistake to think of the statement that there is a God as having a logic or epistemological status analogous to that of the statement that, for example, that one sees a book. It is a mistake because the claim that there is a God in that sense would indicate that it makes sense to ask whether there really is a God where asking this question carries with it the implication that empirical investigation would settle the matter. It indicates that we could set about looking for God in the same way that we set about looking for a book or that we could confirm that there is a God in the same way that we can confirm that this is a tree before us.⁷⁸

The fact that there is a question of there being a wrong and a right of the matter does not entail that we must return to the notion of assessing evidence. In chapter one I wrote that works of art, but not only works of art, can reveal truths about our lives and that these truths are not susceptible of being confirmed or disconfirmed through an abstract process of reasoning carried out in a brief period of time. They are the sorts of truths that have their place within one's life, that are explored in the way that one lives and in serious conversations with one's peers. This fact gives us the content for the sort of confirmation that I have in mind. The sort of confirmation that I have in mind here is commensurate with the idea that a person must come to see that God exists; it is an experiential proof that is analogous to the aesthetic experiential proof and commensurate with the idea that Mavrodes forwarded. That is, a person is provided with an extensive conceptual framework and if that framework connects with their experience, illuminating and making sense of it, then the reality of God would be confirmed for the person who has come to see that there is a God. It is in their experience that God's reality is given, not in their abstract thought and it is in their experience that the reality of God will be confirmed.

⁷⁸For these points see Phillips. *Faith After Foundationalism*. Pp.211, 216, 234, 265. I read Phillips as arguing in this work only that belief in God is non-cognitive in the sense that it is incoherent to think of God as object relative to a subject since conceiving of God in this way leads to the notion that one can investigate whether or not there is a God. It makes no sense to seek to justify the belief that there is a God if we mean by that looking for reasons to support the proposition that God exists. God's reality is given only in the life of the believer.

This experience of coming to see that there is a God is an ongoing experience after having “*an experience*” where an experience is understood as experience that is clearly demarcated from the rest of experience which is ongoing and inchoate. The particular experience is sublated and becomes a part of one’s ongoing experience but an ongoing experience which, after encountering God in an experience, is changed. One has, now a different picture of the world.⁷⁹ It is in the ongoing experience that God’s reality is confirmed. Having this fundamental experience does not preclude the possibility of doubt. As Tracy writes, one is changed by this experience in which one encounters a truth not previously realised but after the experience one may doubt. The moment of truth is no longer there; one has returned to the more mundane experience. The intensity of the moment is lost. We do not continually live in moments with this intensity.⁸⁰ Although this moment of realised truth does not endure, God’s reality is, I am arguing, confirmed or realised in the difference that this moment of truth makes to person who experiences it and in the continuing experience of that person. It is the fundamental moment of a realised truth that sustains the believer or provides the background against which the believer can consider alternative explanations. These considerations have their life within the lived experience of the believer.

Similarly, a person interested in the question whether or not there is a God is not considering alternative explanations in the abstract or need not consider alternative considerations in the abstract. Rather, these considerations have their place within the life of the enquirer. To ask about the possibility of wholesale delusion or to consider alternatives to belief in God is, in this attitude, to live in terms of the answers that are available. If it is not, then Phillips is right that one is making a mistake about the logic of belief in God. An abstract and theoretical enquiry can never establish that there is a God. An enquiry with real concern, can however, establish that there is a God. The process of reasoning about God should not be a formal process but a process in which the subject is herself involved.⁸¹ To think about alternative explanations is not to consider, in the abstract, whether there are alternative explanations for religious

⁷⁹On experience as ongoing see Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. P.97.

⁸⁰Tracy. *The Analogical Imagination*. Pp.112 and 164 respectively.

⁸¹Smith, John E. *Experience and God*. Pp.110-111.

experience but to consider these alternative explanations within the context of asking fundamental questions about one's own life. It is not a question of abstractly considering whether alternative explanations can account for all of the facts but of "living" these alternative explanations. The test is not theoretical and abstract but whether these alternative explanations suffice as answers to one's fundamental concerns.

A useful distinction can be introduced between high level and low level hypotheses.⁸² The Christian way of looking at things has been termed a high level hypothesis, a "*complex and wide ranging*" hypothesis. There are low level hypotheses, or as I would prefer, particular beliefs, within Christianity. For example, beliefs to do with the authorship of a particular book of the Bible. There is also a relation between the two. If a sufficient number of low level beliefs are called into question, then the overall picture begins to change, that is Christianity as a total interpretation of the way that things are, will change. As a complex and wide ranging view of things, the Christian picture is confirmed in living it and over an extensive period of time. We can now make it clear why the religious way of looking at things, as a total picture, cannot be judged according the standards, for a particular belief. The standards used should be those appropriate for a total way of looking at things. If a person wants to know that there is a God and if this question has a religious significance, then the "test" is not whether one can prove the experience to have been veridical. The test is, rather, the change that is brought about in that person.

In the previous section I dealt with Grigg's point that wanting to believe counts against the rationality of the belief. Although I am making use of Franks Davis in articulating conditions in which God's reality is given, my position differs from her own in two ways. First, her language of test and hypothesis is too redolent of scientific enquiry. Secondly, she too sees bias as something to be condemned. Wanting to believe in God is, for her, a fact that would count against God's reality being confirmed since hope,

⁸²Franks Davis. "*The Devotional Experiment*." P.23. I would stress again that the term "hypothesis" is not a felicitous one because it is redolent of the notions of testing and investigation and empirical confirmation. The concept, however, is useful in giving content to belief in God involving a different picture of different way of seeing things.

...can make us see things we hope for or believe in, and incline us to interpret ambiguous results so as to favour the hope or belief.⁸³

Once again we see that any significant interest in the question whether or not there is a God is interpreted negatively. If one wants to believe in God, then there is the possibility that one is seeing what one wants to see and this must be guarded against.

For the person who is coming to see whether God exists, we must look for different criteria that are appropriate for religious belief understood as a comprehensive way of looking at the world and of our place within it. The rationality of religious belief should not be assessed in terms of standards appropriate for scientific beliefs. Comparisons should be made between discourses of the same logical type, not of a different logical type. The criteria relevant for a total way of interpreting the world are not the same as those for the verification of a particular fact.⁸⁴ The question of the rationality of believing in God has much more to do with self understanding, understanding the world and one's place within it, redemptive value, contribution to the meaningfulness of life, and therapeutic value.⁸⁵ Taber says that the right question to ask about religious experiences is not whether we should accept them but why we often do. We often do, not because we have reasons that prove the experience to be veridical but because of the fruits of the experience in the lives of those who have them. These fruits have to do with their honesty, with the quality of their lives, and with their presence of mind.⁸⁶ God's reality is not given in the lives of these people as an inference from certain beliefs. It is given in the difference that the experience has made in their lives.

William James reduces religions to what he perceives to be their lowest common denominator, by saying that all religions deliver us from a felt wrongness or from a situation in which we feel incomplete as we naturally stand.⁸⁷ Caroline Franks Davis puts forward a similar idea in her religious hypothesis which is that, " ... *there is*

⁸³Franks Davis. *"The Devotional Experiment."* P.24.

⁸⁴Smith, John E. "Faith, Belief and Rationality." In Delaney, C.F., ed. *Rationality and Religious Belief*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press. 1979. P.57.

⁸⁵Franks Davis. *"The Devotional Experiment."* P.27.

⁸⁶Taber. *"The Philosophical Evaluation of Religious Experience."* P.56.

⁸⁷James. *Varieties*. P.484.

an ultimate, holy and transcendent, and benevolent force with which human beings can come into contact, in which they can find their greatest bliss, and without which they cannot be “whole” or live life to its fullest.”⁸⁸ Smith says that the reality of God in a religious sense is also an answer to the question about whether there is purpose for existence as a whole.⁸⁹ To ask about the reality of God is at the same time to ask about one’s own existence. This is just one of the forms that the fundamental questioning can take. The focus of the question may be different for different people and it is to the form that the question takes that I now turn.⁹⁰

The rationality of religious belief is given in a different way, in the intelligibility and meaningfulness of a total way of viewing things. In this sense we can follow Sibley and say that belief in God can neither have nor lack a rational basis in the sense in which the evidentialists conceive of a rational basis. It is a confusion of disparate activities to suppose that it could. Philosophers who pose the evidentialist objection to religious belief concentrate specifically upon the propositional content of belief in God, such that the whole question of the existence of God rests on whether or not a proposition can be supported with sufficient evidence. Belief in God is not assent to the single proposition that God exists and God’s reality is not given in the assent to the proposition that God exists. God’s reality is given in a way of seeing things.

I referred earlier to the work of Bartley.⁹¹ He argued that it is a mistake to attempt to find a standard according to which one can claim to know that one’s position is the correct one and argued that for a philosopher who acknowledged that we have no criteria according to which we can guarantee the truth of our beliefs, a different question would become important. This question would acknowledge or presuppose that we can not justify our beliefs in any sense that would guarantee their truth, and ask how we can expose our beliefs to maximum criticism so that we avoid as much intellectual error as possible.⁹² One aspect of this critical activity is the check of the

⁸⁸Franks Davis. “*The Devotional Experiment*.” P.17.

⁸⁹Smith. *Experience and God*. P.56.

⁹⁰Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination. Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Cross Road. 1991. P.164.

⁹¹Chapter 3, Section 1.

⁹²Bartley. *The Retreat To Commitment*. P.140.

problem, or consideration concerning what the theory is intended to solve and whether it does it successfully, has wider applicability. I wrote that if we take this criterion, and consider the nature of belief in God, we might develop criteria according to which belief in God may be judged. We can now see that consideration of the nature of belief in God means that it ought to be judged in terms that are apposite to it and that it ought to be defended in terms that are apposite to it; these terms have to do with the difference that belief in God makes in the life of the believer.

5.5 Conclusion

My conclusion is that God's reality is given in encountering God and that it is the fact of encountering God that is, or should be, of central importance in coming to terms with the demand for evidence to show that God exists. Fundamentally, a person who asks whether there is a God must be brought to see that there is a God, brought to encounter God. Secondly, the concept of encountering God has elucidated the relationship between evidence and argument and seeing that there is a God. To encounter God one must have a more than theoretical interest in the question whether there is a God and, if one has a more than theoretical interest in the question, then argument and evidence do have a function in the process of coming to see that there is a God. Argument and evidence also have a place within the life of the believer who is aware of alternative explanations for belief in God, as long as it is understood that the context for argument and evidence is, for the believer, that of having encountered God. Finally, as we have seen, to fail to include, in a reply to the demand for evidence to show that one knows that there is a God, any reference to the significance of encountering God and any reference to the way in which God's reality is given in the life of the believer, is a mistake. In the case of Alvin Plantinga's defence of the rationality of religious belief, I have shown that the result is, first of all, a fundamental disagreement between believer and non-believer over whether believers are justified in believing in God. With the addition of his claim to know that his Christian position is the right one, his thesis becomes inconsistent. He makes a claim to knowledge, has eschewed evidence, and since he does not make any reference to what God means in the life of the believer, has no alternative for defending the rationality of religious belief. At the start of the thesis I quoted Penelhum who asked why apologists do not

appeal to religious experience or try to bring it about through preaching.⁹³ As I see the relationship between a person asking whether there is a God and the believer, the believer has to preach at the person asking, given content in terms of bringing them to see that there is a God.

In terms of the parameters of the debate, I suggested only that insights from aesthetics had the potential to change the parameters of the debate. If what I have written is accepted, then there is a case for saying that philosophers should cease asking for evidence for the existence of God and apologists should move beyond the attempt to show that belief in God is rational in a minimal sense. This latter keeps the debate within the parameters of the evidentialist challenge, since evidentialists deny that belief in God is rational in this sense, arguing that there are good reasons to suppose that, for example, those who claim to have encountered God have not really done so. It is at least clear, that there is a division created by the fact that apologists have encountered God, an encounter which they bring with them in their reply to the evidentialist challenge.

The question of the grounds for belief in God is not susceptible of an easy answer. Given my position in this thesis, belief in God is not based upon reasons from which the believer infers that there is a God. Neither is it based upon the experience of the believer. Rather belief in God is presupposed in the way that believers see things. It is, in this sense, and as Phillip's noted, groundless. Our fundamental beliefs are not based upon any other beliefs that we have or upon our experience. They are given in the way that we look at things. Questions to do with whether there is a God can not be answered by providing grounds or reasons from which it follows that there is a God. All that believers can do is explain why they believe in God and bring a person to see as they see. Thus if we understand the question about grounds as a request for explanation, as a request to do with why a believer does so believe, then the ground for belief in God is encounter with God. The response to the question is an elucidation of what is responsible for their belief in God.

⁹³Penelhum, Terrence. *Religion and Rationality*. New York: Random House. 1971. Pp.175-176.

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